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Fine doorstops

I COULDN'T PUT DOWN Donna Tartt's book *The Goldfinch*. I found myself reading it late into the night and even structuring my day so that I could get back to reading. Stephen King wrote about its 700-page length: "Prospective buyers have every right to ask: 'Do I really want to give two weeks of my reading life to this novel?'" He then called *The Goldfinch* "a rarity," one of a very few books that connect to both head and heart.

Narrator Theo is rescued from various tragedies by the love of parents, a wild friend, a mysterious girl, and a patient older man. The book includes profanity, underage drug use, and drinking, but there is a recurrent theme of the redemptive potential in human relationships and human love. The story also touches on the theological themes of evil and the suffering of innocents, as well as occasional almost Christ-like self-giving.

Another fine doorstop of a book is Doris Kearns Goodwin's *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* (910 pages, including notes and index). Theodore Roosevelt is known for his boundless physical vigor, intellectual curiosity, and optimism about the future of the United States. I was grateful for the book's reminder of just

how progressive Roosevelt was. He was responsible for the federal government taking seriously, for the first time, stewardship of the nation's natural beauty and resources. He also recognized the threat of the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few individuals and the corporations. As a trust-buster he took on John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil monopoly and Cornelius Vanderbilt's unregulated railroad empire.

While reading about Roosevelt's battle with the financial elite of the nation I came across "America's Taxation Tradition" in the *New York Times*. Paul Krugman asked readers to name the leader who said the following: "The absence of effective State, and, especially, national, restraint upon unfair money-getting has tended to create a small class of enormously wealthy and economically powerful men, whose chief object is to hold and increase their power." The speaker was Theodore Roosevelt in his famous 1910 "New Nationalism" speech.

Economic inequality is still a critical national issue. It poses the same threat to the nation today as it did a century ago, and the threat is exacerbated by the recent Supreme Court decision that allows individuals to donate enormous amounts of money to political parties and individual candidates.

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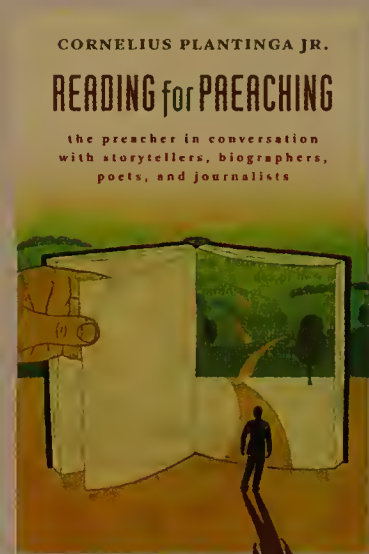
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Bridging the divide

I enjoyed the article on the conservative evangelical and the liberal who worked together in a local pastors group (“No longer strangers,” March 19). I fear, however, that the article perpetuates the notion that there is only a mushy and ill-defined space between this divide.

Many people hunger for a faith that is authentic to historic Christianity and—precisely because of that fidelity—deeply engaged with the contemporary world. Not all evangelicals are literal, inerrant creationists, and not all liberals are leftist liberationists. Most thoughtful Christians are merely Christian. Somehow we mere Christians need to find each other.

David W. Opderbeck
Midland Park, N.J.

Scriptural bases . . .

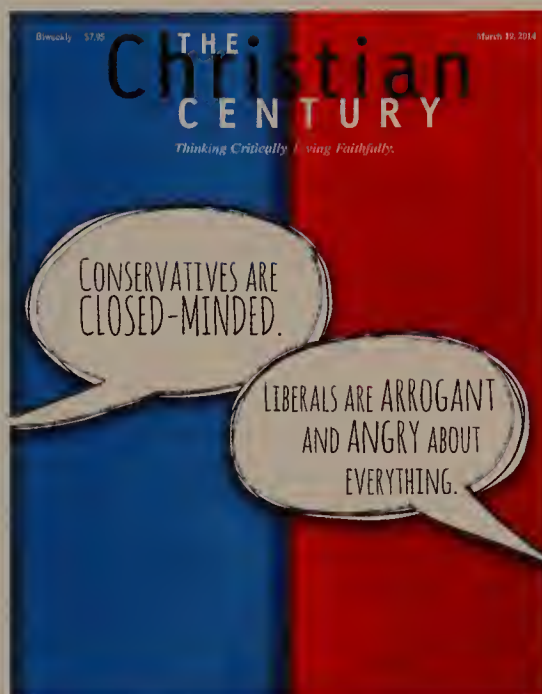
I thoroughly enjoyed John Bowlin’s parable of the sacrifice bunt (“Laying one down,” April 2). The connections he made between Jesus’ sacrifice because of his love for us and obedience to his Father were quite thought-provoking. I kept thinking of Romans 12:1, where Paul admonishes us “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Bowlin helped me understand that becoming “living sacrifices” does not imply endless martyrdom but rather is a way for us to fulfill the mission God has for each of us. By living our lives completely for him, we can help others on their way around the bases of life.

Mark McLean
Walhalla, S.C.

Liturgical fiction . . .

Amy Frykholm’s interview with Kent Haruf (“The precious ordinary,” March 19) enhanced my thoughts



about the books and the author. I have read all of Haruf’s books and enjoyed them immensely. I grew up in Colorado, so I especially appreciate the settings. I was surprised that he wasn’t asked about the titles of his books—*Plainsong*, *Benediction*, *The Tie That Binds*, *Eventide*—which allude to the liturgy. When I think of the titles and the stories, I see a progression through the liturgical hours.

Dorothea Wilson
Winthrop, Wash.

Living with mystery . . .

I am dismayed that John Buchanan, for whose work and words I have great respect, writes that he finds himself “moving away from the . . . idea that Jesus had to die a sacrificial lamb to satisfy an offended and angry deity” (“The ultimate mystery,” April 2). Theologian Jaroslav Pelikan, while speaking of Aquinas’s theory of transubstantiation, told his students—myself among them—that the fault with that teaching was that it “attempted to make a mystery credible,” or

maybe “attempted to explain a mystery.” One can find the explanation wanting without throwing out the mystery of the real presence.

Surely one can say the same about Anselm’s theory of the atonement. It seems to me that satisfying “an offended and angry deity” is an unfortunate Anselm-like attempt to make a mystery credible. Discard it. That our Lord was a sacrificial lamb whose blood was shed “for the forgiveness of sins” is the essence of the gospel and is a mystery beyond explanation. Please don’t throw out the mystery with the explanation.

Richard O. Hoyer
Wichita, Kan.

United Methodist reality . . .

I appreciated Amy Frykholm’s article on the situation in the United Methodist Church (“A time to split?” April 16). I locate myself on the left end of the conservative-progressive spectrum, and I am often frustrated reading articles about the challenges that face the UMC related to sexuality. It matters not whether the writer is progressive or conservative. The church faces a complex reality that many writers have trouble getting their heads (and their pens) around. I appreciated the obvious care that Frykholm took to understand the complexity and portray the reality in a way that conveys the fullness of the situation.

Having worked passionately, and I believe faithfully, on trying to move our denomination in the direction of fuller inclusion for over 40 years, I believe we have some difficult choices to make in the years ahead. They won’t be easy for anyone. Articles such as Frykholm’s present these options with a clarity and respect.

Kathryn Johnson
Washington, D.C.

April 30, 2014

Money talks

One person, one vote: this principle is the bedrock of American democracy. The intent is to ensure that each citizen has as much say as any other, regardless of social or economic status. Consistent with that aim, campaign finance laws have sought to limit the exorbitant power that wealthy individuals and corporations can exert on the political process.

Campaign finance rules have been seriously eroded of late, however, and they were further diluted by the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision to strike down limits on how much money donors can contribute to individual political candidates, political parties, and political action committees. Prior to the court's April ruling in *McCutcheon v. Federal Elections Commission*, donors were limited to a maximum of \$48,600 in contributions to individual candidates during a two-year election cycle. The court declared that limit to be a violation of donors' free-speech rights under the First Amendment.

While the court left in place the cap of \$2,600 on how much an individual can give to each political candidate, contributors can now give to as many candidates and political action committees as they wish up to \$2.4 million. Wealthy political donors will be able to hedge their bets and contribute to as many candidates as they wish—and in turn shape public policy to their interests.

In its ruling, the court said Congress should worry only about "quid pro quo" corruption—"a direct exchange of an official act for money." The fact that campaign contributions give wealthy individuals a significant leg up in influence and access—as many members of Congress freely acknowledge—does not constitute corruption in the eyes of the court.

Paired with the 2009 ruling in the *Citizens United* case—which gave corporations and labor unions the right to finance their own electioneering activities—the court's April ruling brings us closer to the crossroads outlined by former chief justice Louis Brandeis, who said: "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

In his dissent from *McCutcheon*, Justice Stephen Breyer took a more realistic view than did the majority: "There [is] an indisputable link between generous political donations and opportunity after opportunity to make one's case directly to a member of Congress," he wrote. "Where enough money calls the tune, the general public will not be heard."

The danger, according to Breyer, is not only that wealthy people will have undue influence but also that the widespread appearance of corruption will generate cynicism and political disengagement on the part of citizens.

Liberals are sometimes accused of having a too-rosy view of human nature. But in this case the "liberal" argument for campaign finance law is based on realism about human nature and politics.

The court's decision lets money call the tune.

CENTURY marks

REPURPOSED: HoneyMaid, maker of graham crackers, received many negative responses to its “This is wholesome” ad featuring a same-sex couple. Rather than backing down or counterattacking, HoneyMaid printed all the negative comments and had a collage made from them spelling the word *love*. Cheerios likewise doubled down when it received negative feedback to its ad featuring a mixed-race couple with a cute daughter. Cheerios ran a sequel to it during the Super Bowl (*Washington Post*, April 4).

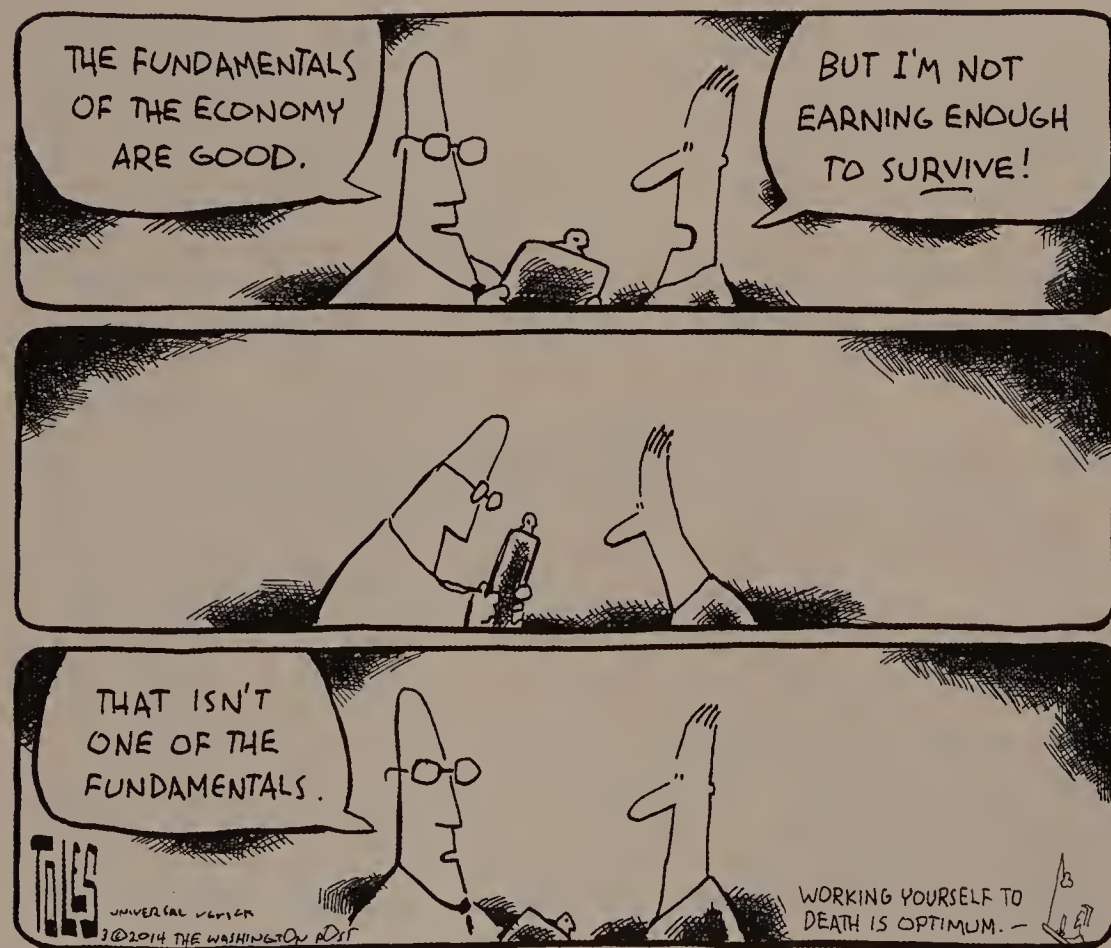
been taking photographs of Hutu perpetrators alongside Tutsi survivors. In each case the perpetrators have asked for and the survivors have granted forgiveness. Hugo says the photos are very revealing: in some photos the subjects appear very comfortable with each other, in others there is noticeable physical and emotional distance between them. “There’s clearly different degrees of forgiveness,” he says, adding that forgiveness isn’t motivated by benevolence as much as “a survival instinct” (*New York Times Magazine*, April 6).

DEGREES OF FORGIVENESS: Two decades have passed since nearly a million people were killed in the Rwandan genocide. Photographer Pieter Hugo has

REPERCUSSIONS: Justin Welby, archbishop of Canterbury, is predicting that Christians in Africa will be massacred if

the Church of England approves gay marriage. “I have stood by gravesides in Africa of a group of Christians who had been attacked because of something that had happened in America,” he said. The killers, he reported, had feared that because of the Christians they would “all be made to become homosexual,” and so they determined to “kill all the Christians.” Rowan Williams, Welby’s predecessor as archbishop of Canterbury, reportedly anguished over the same concern (*Guardian*, April 4).

CHURCH GUARDS: Thousands of Christians have been taking turns standing guard at a Christian church in the Chinese city of Wenzhou since the provincial Communist Party in early April condemned it and announced plans to raze it. The church is part of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, China’s officially sanctioned and government-controlled Protestant body, which makes the standoff unusual. Government officials claim that the church, which took six years to build, was illegally constructed and is structurally unsound. One 74-year-old congregant begged officials to leave her church alone, offering her life instead. “Even if they take my head, I can still find happiness with God,” she said. Christians in China now outnumber Communist Party members, according to one estimate (*Telegraph*, April 4).



ONE LORD: Pope Francis recently appeared in a video addressing Pentecostal Christians in friendly terms. He suggested that Pentecostals and Catholics are “brothers” in Christ and called

for a relationship in which they embrace each other and together worship Jesus Christ as the only Lord of history. There has long been distrust between the two groups, and in some parts of the world Pentecostals are drawing large numbers of former Catholics. The video has gone viral among Pentecostals, and at least one Pentecostal expert has said the pope's words have reset the relationship. When the pope was archbishop of Buenos Aires, he was criticized by some Catholics for being too cozy with Pentecostals (AP).

ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WRONGS:

The food movement has called attention to the abuse of animals that are raised and killed on factory farms. But even farmers who raise animals in humane ways, in small-scale operations, intend for the animals to be slaughtered. Bob Comis, a professional pig farmer, asks how can he ethically raise pigs knowing that his ultimate aim is to kill and market them for consumption. "As a pig farmer, I lead an unethical life," Comis confesses. "I am a slaveholder and a murderer" (*American Scholar*, Spring).

AGEISM? The focus of geriatric doctors on testing for memory loss, which leads to possible diagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's, is part of a war against the old, according to Margaret Morganroth Gullette, resident scholar at Brandeis University. She likens it to educators being preoccupied with testing schoolchildren. "'Dementia' is a label that dehumanizes," she says. What aging people need is social support, which itself can enhance a sense of well-being that contributes to better memory. "In thinking about memory loss, we do well to remember two simple precepts," she says. "Do not panic about your own. Be gentle toward other people's" (*Interpretation*, April).

GOING HOME AGAIN? Before he was diagnosed with a terminal illness, essayist Christopher Hitchens was asked by literary critic James Wood what he

would do if he had only weeks to live: would he stay in the United States or go home to Britain? "I'd go to Dartmoor, without a doubt," Hitchens replied, referring to his childhood home. It is not unusual for people to want to go home to die, but they often find that home is no longer the same place and that one has also changed in the meantime. Wood, who lived in the United

States for 18 years, compares going home to Durham, England, his birthplace, to a masquerade. "It is possible to miss home terribly, not know what home really is anymore, and refuse to go home, all at once." *Homelooseness* is the word he coined to describe the condition of feeling that no place is home anymore (*London Review of Books*, February 20).

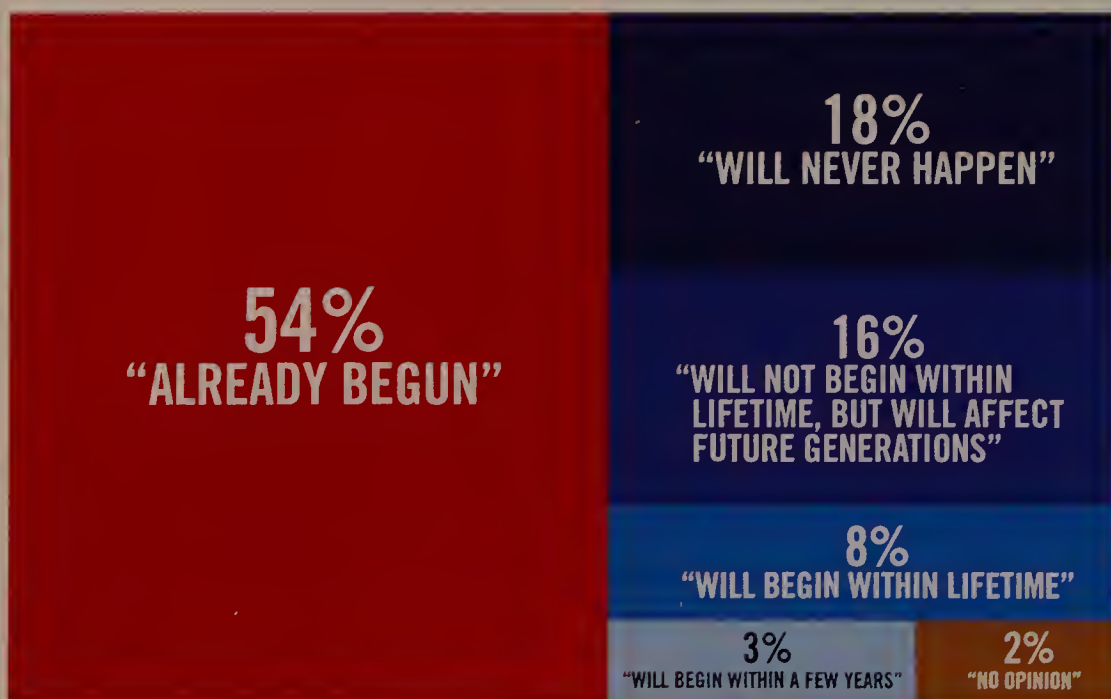
“When it comes to expressing yourself freely, and worshiping as you choose, and having open access to information — we believe those are universal rights that are the birthright of every person on this planet.”

— First Lady **Michelle Obama** in a speech given while touring China (*New York Times*, March 22)

“Gay men should, of course, darling one another; those of us whose darlings are of the opposite sex should be glad that they do, and glad of instruction in love by the ways in which they do. Love is hard enough to come by in a devastated world without encouraging blindness to its presence.”

— Catholic theologian **Paul J. Griffiths**, reviewing *Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography*, by Richard Rodriguez (*First Things*, April)

EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING



SOURCE: GALLUP

Read this first

"If you had to choose one book to help a person embarking on pastoral ministry, what would it be?" We posed that question to some pastors and professors. Here are their choices.

***Christianity Rediscovered*, by Vincent J. Donovan** (Orbis). I return to this book more than almost any other because it reminds me why I'm a priest, what the church is, and how God is at work in places before I ever show up. Donovan shows me that what has become the ritual of worship is really a pattern of practices that are needed to remake community and shape society. He shows through story and example how to see the social significance, theological depth, and missionary opportunity in everyday habits and events.

Most of all he teaches the reader to see the passion of human encounter and intensity of human experience as a window into the heart of God. Memorably, he tells about a Masai elder who contrasts a white hunter shooting an animal from afar to a lion wrapping its limbs and claws around its prey. The elder says that we think we should become more like the lion in our striving to believe, but that the truth is, the lion is God.

—**Samuel Wells**, vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London

***The Fault in Our Stars*, by John Green** (Dutton). I tried to talk myself out of selecting a young adult book published in 2012. How could John Green possibly be shelved alongside Tillich in the pastor's study? But I like the idea of new pastors plumbing the depths of critically acclaimed and enormously popular books written for teenagers—especially when they are as insightful and sensitive as this one.

It's a book about love, cancer, life, and death that skewers the facile wisdom frequently doled out by people—including clergy—who mean well. Green takes young people seriously in a way that many youth ministries don't. The story

makes me weep not only because it is honest about how tragic life can be, but also because it testifies that love can spike even the most tragic lives with beauty and joy.

—**Katherine Willis Pershey**, associate minister of the First Congregational Church, Western Springs, Illinois

***The Book of Pastoral Rule* (also known as *Pastoral Care*), by Gregory the Great** (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press). Pope Gregory the Great's famous treatise, written at the end of the sixth century, presents challenges to and must be adapted for contemporary Protestant clergy. It is a provocative countercultural voice filled with wisdom for a young pastor. Gregory describes ministry as "the art of arts," a wonderful reminder of the high calling of ministry.

While we are too easily preoccupied with worthwhile but undirected activities, he focuses on the telos of the church, of ministry, and of Christian life: to bear witness to the reign of God. Gregory emphasizes the importance of pastoral agility, noting the ways in which even our virtues can become vices and how we can become myopic and crooked. This is a timeless and very timely resource for parish ministry.

—**L. Gregory Jones**, professor of theology and Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina

***Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, by Reinhold Niebuhr** (Westminster John Knox). Reinhold Niebuhr was 23 years old when he began this journal of his experience as the pastor of a blue-collar church in Detroit. Pastors will be reassured to read how even the great Niebuhr struggles with the pastoral role. He admits that before making a pastoral call, he usually walks past a house two or three times before summoning the courage to go in. He despairs that after preaching a dozen sermons in his new church he has exhausted everything he learned in seminary. He

confesses the awkwardness of preaching a sermon on giving to the church when his own salary is at stake.

We often hear about how much pastoral ministry has changed, but this book is a reminder that the opposite also is true—in the almost 100 years since Niebuhr wrote this book, so much about pastoral ministry has remained the same.

—**Martin B. Copenhaver**, president-elect of Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Massachusetts

***The Circle*, by Dave Eggers** (Knopf). Eggers's novel is about a mega social network corporation that takes over the world—seemingly benevolently. Its characters have no depth or soul; their personhood is defined by electronic connectedness. It is an alarmingly accurate (if heavy-handed) account of the contemporary cultural context.

We continually hear that we must bring everything online—that there is no other way to be successful. New church leaders would do well to pause and consider this TechGnosticism on the one hand and, on the other, what the church has going for it: the body and the blood, messy physicality, incarnation. Maybe it's OK not to tweet. My teenage children would disagree, but I'm making them read the book, too.

—**Debbie Blue**, pastor at House of Mercy, St. Paul, Minnesota

***Redeeming Administration: 12 Spiritual Habits for Catholic Leaders in Parishes, Schools, Religious Communities, and Other Institutions*, by Ann M. Garrido** (Ave Maria Press). Most spirituality books provide advice for cultivating the familiar set of spiritual disciplines. This book is different. Garrido helps people see how the ordinary lives of leaders opens the pathways to spiritual formation. In her words, "administration calls us" to a set of 12 spiritual values. It leads us to see our lives and the world broadly and systemically, puts us directly in touch



with our need for generativity, confronts us with the absolute need to cultivate trust, and opens the path to humility and interdependence.

The book's title misleads: I'm using it in a course called Spirituality for Public Engagement which I lead for Lutheran laypersons, many of whom are not professional administrators. We all fulfill multiple roles and in many cases we're unclear as to how those roles relate to who we are before God. Garrido offers gracious wisdom for discernment.

—**Greg Carey**, professor of New Testament, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania

To the Lighthouse, by Virginia Woolf (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). Woolf's novel meticulously details the hidden dimensions of human life to which ministers should be attentive: the unknowable more that each person contains; the distances across which we try to connect; the ordinary illuminations our lives offer, "matches struck in the dark."

Woolf's novel also mourns warmaking as the extinguishing of light and creativity and offers a vision of the artist—a vision I want to claim for the minister as well—as a lover whose work it is to create from disparate fragments new wholes "over which thought lingers, and love plays." Woolf sharpens our attention to the world around us and makes us want to live differently—like the best ministers do.

—**Stephanie Paulsell**, professor of the practice of ministry, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

The E-Myth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It, by Michael E. Gerber (HarperCollins). "The church doesn't need to be run like a business," a mentor once told me, "but it surely shouldn't be run like a

bad business." That's why the book I'd recommend is a book about small business failure and success. Imagine a woman who loves baking cookies, or a teenager who plays a wicked blues guitar, or a gardener who has a knack for growing daisies. Encouraged by others, they decide to turn their passion into a career. Quickly they find out that a passion for baking, strumming, or growing daisies isn't the same as a skill for starting and growing a business. Without the latter, they won't be able to enjoy the former.

Something similar happens to people with a sincere passion for preaching, counseling, leading worship, teaching, praying, or disciple making. Church leadership is about leadership—and that includes organizational and financial leadership. *The E-Myth* helped me when I was coping with a minister's complex and sometimes competing demands. I think it will help other ministers, too.

—**Brian McLaren**, author of *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road? Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World*

Crime and Punishment, by Fyodor Dostoevsky (Penguin Classics). With characters like the conscience-stricken Raskolnikov and the messed-up Svidrigailov, Dostoevsky provides an unforgettable meditation on what it means to be human. He shows us the aches of the human heart, the deceptions we create, often unknowingly, and the hopes we have to be better people.

It's sometimes said that fiction is truer than fact because fiction pulls out the threads of who we are and magnifies them in ways we can explore and dissect. This is why I suggest reading fiction regularly. The messiness of people's lives wears on ministers, and it is easy to become hardened to the strings of excuses, the alligator tears of remorse, and the half-lived lives. A

book like *Crime and Punishment* allows us to see the bigger picture and the bolder promise of humanity.

—**Laura Truax**, senior pastor, LaSalle Street Church, Chicago

Description of the Parson in *The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer. In the general prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*, nestled among descriptions of corrupt church officials and worldly pilgrims, is this characterization of a small-church pastor who is Christlike and humble, who loves God, loves his people, loves his place, and preaches and teaches the Bible. Not afraid to prophetically challenge, he is always motivated by Christ-centered love. He reads books and thinks, he prays, and he visits, visits, visits. He knows that being a pastor is not about himself but is about God and God's people. Chaucer's model of a true pastor is as pertinent today as it was in the 14th century.

—**Kyle Childress**, pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church, Nacogdoches, Texas

The Power and the Glory, by Graham Greene (Penguin Classics). In the mid-1930s, the Marxist and fanatically anticlerical Tomás Garrido Canabal governed the Mexican state of Tabasco. Possessed by a hatred for Christianity, he outlawed religious rites and sent his ruthless vigilantes marauding across the land, murdering priests and destroying Catholic churches. Against this backdrop, Graham Greene introduces the protagonist of his classic novel, the alcoholic and adulterous whiskey priest. In dark and somber prose, Graham, a convert to Catholicism, portrays this lonely figure as he struggles to perform his priestly ministry in a society gone mad and also in the face of his own moral collapse.

What emerges is a picture of ministry shorn of all romanticism, polite piety, and social support, of ministry sustained only by Christ, who died not "for what was good or beautiful, . . . [but] for the half-hearted and the corrupt." The novel wrests priestly ministry from a naive doctrine of progress and points it toward a profound theology of hope.

—**Thomas G. Long**, professor of preaching, Candler School of Theology, Atlanta

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THE Christian CENTURY



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& scholars at the Center of Theological Inquiry

Wednesday, May 14, 2014

8:00 PM EST / 7:00 PM CST

With support from the John Templeton Foundation



Amy Frykholm



Stephen Pope



Colleen Shantz



Michael Spezio

We know more than ever about what goes on in our brains and bodies when people pray or meditate. Does our knowledge about these experiences tell us anything about God and the world?

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To register for this free event, please go to <http://livewebcast.net/cti/051414>.

Registration is open until 12:00 PM EST on Monday, May 12, 2014.

Sources include:
Religion News Service (RNS)
USA Today, other newspapers
Associated Baptist Press (ABP)
denominational news services

Clergy residences under scrutiny

Bye-bye, Bishop Bling. So long, Pastor Perks. The so-called Francis effect may be real, at least when it comes to clerical housing, and could be coming to a church near you.

Pope Francis famously eschewed the trappings of the papal office, including deluxe digs in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, and the force of his example seems to be making itself felt.

The pontiff accepted in March the resignation of the most ostentatious offender, Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst of Limburg, Germany, also known as "Bishop Bling," who spent \$43 million on a swank new residence and office complex while cutting staff.

The latest to feel peer pressure is Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta. On March 31, Gregory responded to anger over his move into a new \$2.2 million home with apologies to his flock. After meeting April 5 with archdiocesan advisory councils, Gregory announced he would move to simpler quarters in May and sell the mansion.

Here are some of the latest controversies over clerical lifestyles:

Tebartz-van Elst was in a class of his own, spending nearly \$500,000 on walk-in closets, nearly \$300,000 on a fish tank, more than \$200,000 on a spiral staircase, and \$20,000 on a bathtub. He also spent more than \$600,000 on artwork.

Archbishop Wilton Gregory led off a written column of apology with this complaint from a parishioner, which sums up the new dynamic: "We are disturbed and disappointed to see our church leaders not setting the example of a simple life as Pope Francis calls for."

Gregory explained the rationale behind his move and the purchase of the new home, using a bequest from the nephew of *Gone with the Wind* author Margaret

Mitchell. But he conceded the reasons weren't nearly sufficient to justify the move to the 6,000-square-foot house in Atlanta's tony Buckhead neighborhood.

In Newark, New Jersey, Archbishop John Myers hasn't opted for penitence and instead is defending the expenditure of some \$500,000 to pay for a three-story, 3,000-square-foot addition to his already spacious retirement home. The new wing will include an indoor exercise pool, a hot tub, three fireplaces, a library, and an elevator.

"Archbishop Myers obviously is not paying any attention to the pope," said Charles Zech, who has studied bishops' spending as faculty director of the Center for Church Management and Business Ethics at Villanova University's business school.

The Diocese of Camden, New Jersey, includes one of the poorest cities in the country, which is partly why Bishop Dennis

Sullivan made headlines in January for spending \$500,000 to buy a historic 7,000-square-foot mansion with eight bedrooms, six bathrooms, three fireplaces, a library, a five-car garage, and a pool. The diocese said Sullivan needs the space to entertain dignitaries and donors. Not everyone's buying that. "This is a joke," parishioner John Miller told the local paper. "Jesus was born in a stable."

Catholics aren't the only ones feeling the heat. Trinity Church in Boston, an Episcopal congregation with a blue-blood heritage and an extensive ministry to the poor, sparked controversy in February for purchasing a \$3.6 million Beacon Hill condo for its rector, Samuel T. Lloyd III. The church says the outlay is a good investment and won't dent its \$30 million endowment, but some in the pews aren't happy.

Last fall, Steven Furtick, the 33-year-old pastor of Elevation Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, came in for



SELLING MANSION: Responding to critics, Atlanta Archbishop Wilton Gregory (far right), seen here in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in 2012, is moving to more modest quarters.

criticism for plans to build a 16,000-square-foot estate with 7.5 bathrooms and an electrified gate. Furtick, a Southern Baptist who heads one of the nation's fastest-growing congregations, probably didn't help his cause when he said that the \$1.6 million home is "not that great of a house." But the purchase seems to be moving ahead nonetheless. —David Gibson, RNS

Bible society to sell its longtime quarters

The American Bible Society will sell its 12-story building on Broadway, vacating prime real estate in the heart of Manhattan that serves other evangelical ministries.

The society provides space to several New York-based evangelical organizations, such as Q Ideas, Redeemer Presbyterian Church's Center for Faith & Work, the Museum of Biblical Art, and Young Life. Through the years, the building had become a destination for Christians in the city.

The 200-year-old ABS first occupied the 1865 Broadway address in 1966 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Billy Graham. The organization has not made any decisions about a new location, but a spokesperson said it remained committed to New York City.

"The decision to sell the property was made to unlock the value of the site to further the mission of American Bible Society," board chairman Pieter Dearolf said in a statement. "I believe we will always maintain a presence in New York City, the epicenter of American culture and commerce."

ABS was last in the spotlight in January, when it named Roy Peterson to succeed Doug Birdsall as president. Birdsall was fired by the ABS board in October after only months on the job. The former director expressed surprise when he was told that ABS was selling the building.

"It's the best Christian real estate in the country, some of the best Christian real estate in the world," Birdsall said. "It may add to the financial assets, but it doesn't necessarily expand the significance of the ministry."



FOR SALE: The American Bible Society plans to sell its piece of prime real estate in the heart of Manhattan in order to further its mission.

Birdsall estimated that ABS occupied about 40 percent of the building and rented out the rest to other organizations. The land, he said, is likely worth around \$300 million. "The base of the building could itself be a gold mine given the astronomical level of retail rents in the area," reports *Cranes New York Business*.

Cushman & Wakefield, a real estate firm with a mission to "help clients turn fixed assets into dynamic assets," will help the organization sell the property and select a new site. "Their number one criteria is not to find other Christians [to buy] but to release that space for assets," said ABS spokesman Geof Morin.

ABS also has a staff of about 80 people in offices located outside Philadelphia, about the same number of employees as in its New York headquarters, Morin said. He added that the organization faces updates in code requirements costing tens of millions of dollars within the next 18 months and plans to sell the building in the next 14 to 15 months.

"We know and we're honest about how it's expensive to be in New York City. We have no intention of abandoning it," said Morin, suggesting that the organization is determining whether to buy, lease, or rent property. "Where we put our core operations has not been determined."

Before Birdsall was fired, he had proposed replacing the existing building with a 30-story structure that could

include an Omni Hotel and space for other ministries to rent. He said the Hobby Lobby-founding Green family was interested in getting involved in a Bible exhibition.

ABS has been losing money in the last several years; its assets of \$693 million in 2007 fell to \$389 million in 2012. From 2002 through 2011 ABS overspent its budget by \$250 million, *World* magazine reported.

As Birdsall moved forward with plans for a new building, the board thought the staff had a lack of transparency during the process, creating tensions and misunderstandings. Other evangelical leaders stood by Birdsall after his firing.

"The vision requires a certain amount of risk," Birdsall said, given how expensive it is to own a building in New York.

The building's greatest asset was its location, close to Columbus Circle, Lincoln Center, and Central Park, said Gregory Thornbury, president of the King's College. "That is one of the most enviable plots of real estate on the island of Manhattan," he said.

King's recently moved, relocating from the Empire State Building to lower Manhattan next to Wall Street. "Evangelical institutions have abandoned the cities," Thornbury said. "New York is the seat of power on planet Earth, so it takes a constant vigilance and focus and determination to stay in the game." —Sarah Pulliam Bailey, RNS

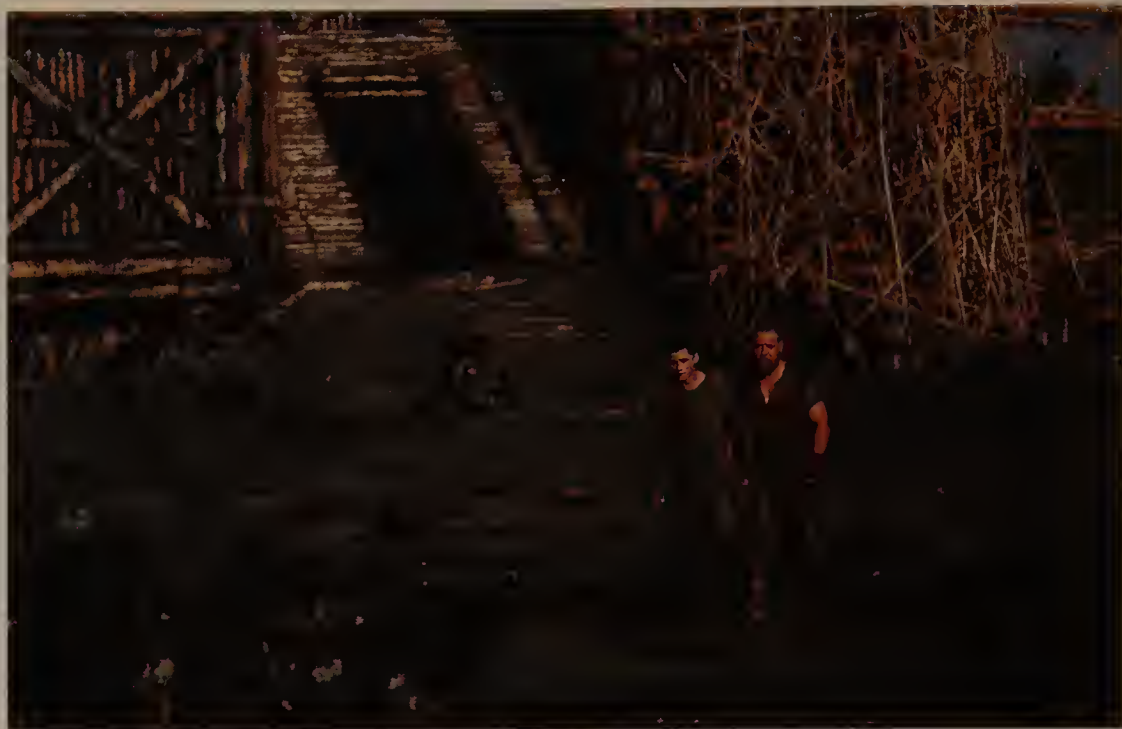
Critics find *Noah* lacking in ethnic diversity

The new movie *Noah* has everything you'd expect in a biblical blockbuster: big Hollywood stars, extravagant special effects, an apocalyptic flood. There's even a few rock monsters for good measure.

But Episcopal priest Wil Gafney sees something missing: a hint of ethnic diversity. "In this version of *Noah*, black people do not exist," she said.

While much of the conversation about *Noah* has focused on theology and the degree to which it strays from the biblical text, few people seem to notice the all-white cast, said Gafney, who is also associate professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

That's worrisome, she said, especially at a time when the United States is becoming more and more multiethnic. "I hoped that at least there would be some beige people in the movie," she said. "But there was no one visibly of color."



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT: Russell Crowe (right), as *Noah*, leads a cast that critics claim lacks the ethnic diversity of the biblical world.

Efrem Smith, president of Los Angeles-based World Impact, a Christian nonprofit, and author of *The Post-Black and Post-White Church*, sees *Noah* as part of a pattern.

In the past, biblical epics, such as the

1956 classic *The Ten Commandments*, featured white actors playing Moses and Pharaoh. Smith said that he'd hoped for something more authentic in this movie. "When it comes to films on Bible stories and biblical figures, we are going back to the days of Charlton Heston," he said.

Smith said he respects pastors who encourage people to see the film, but he wishes they'd be a bit more critical of it, especially on the issue of race. The Bible, he said, is the most multicultural piece of literature that most people will ever read. A film about the Bible should reflect that diversity, he said.

But recent films about Bible characters, such as *Son of God* and a planned version of the Exodus story starring Christian Bale, star white actors in leading roles.

"We need sensitivity from our evangelical brothers and sisters about how white images of Bible figures have impacted people of color in the past," Smith said. "We are too comfortable with a white biblical narrative."

Tennessee-based writer and speaker Trillia Newbell, author of *United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity*, also was concerned about the portrayals. Seeing Jesus or Noah or other biblical characters portrayed by white actors has consequences. "It shapes how you read the Bible," she said. "Every time you pick up the Bible, those are the images you see."

Golden Gate seminary sells site, will move

AFTER FUTILE efforts to build homes for sale on its 126-acre campus amid prime real estate near San Francisco Bay, the Southern Baptist-affiliated Golden Gate Theological Seminary is selling its site and making plans to relocate in Southern California.

Seminary president Jeff Iorg announced the sale on April 1 at the Mill Valley campus for an undisclosed amount to North Coast Land Holdings, a family foundation. "The final agreement will result in resources for a new primary campus in Southern California, a new commuter campus in the Bay Area, . . . as well as a substantial addition to the seminary's endowment," said Iorg, as reported by Baptist Press.

The decision by seminary trustees to sell the campus came two years after Marin County officials rejected

the school's plan to build 117 new structures, including 74 homes for private purchase, because it conflicted with a 1984 master plan, according to Associated Baptist Press. Homes on average more sell for more than \$1 million near the campus, which is seven miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Iorg assured current enrollees at the seminary that their degree progress will not be interrupted for the next two years because the school has a lease-back agreement for the current campus. Student housing will also stay open for the next two years.

The seminary has a two-acre branch campus in Brea, California. But Iorg did not indicate where the new main campus would be situated except to say the seminary would benefit from continued population growth in Southern California.

Anthea Butler, a blogger and associate professor of religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania, said the filmmakers seemed to treat the story of Noah more like a science fiction story such as *The Lord of the Rings* than a retelling of a biblical tale.

That may explain why the cast doesn't fit the movie's setting in the Middle East, she said.

Butler also suspects that filmmakers may have made a major marketing error.

A new report from the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture found that African-Americans are the most likely to read the Bible. So they care about Bible stories and may be turned off by this new *Noah* movie. —Bob Smietana, RNS

Thrivent Financial not for Lutherans only

For the first time in its long history, Thrivent Financial is not just for Lutherans. The 111-year-old financial services firm began taking applications in March from Christians of every denomination.

The change from "Thrivent Financial for Lutherans" to just "Thrivent Financial" was not a simple response to declining membership in the Lutheran Church, board chairman Dick Moeller said, although that factor was discussed during the lengthy transition talks.

It's more about having a long-term strategy to share the company's Christian business principles with more people, he said.

It also means that Thrivent, which ranks 325th on the Fortune 500 list with \$90.4 billion in assets under management, has been able to stash away a "big rainy-day fund" of \$7 billion.

"Wall Street doesn't like rainy-day funds because it tends to be a drag on earnings," said Randy Boushek, chief financial officer, adding that Thrivent's surplus helped it grow during the depths of the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009.

The United States has three main Lutheran denominations, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and the

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The ELCA, the largest of the three with 3.9 million members in the United States, reported a drop in weekly attendance of 26 percent from 2003 to 2011.

Moeller said the company chose to use the Apostles' Creed—a statement of Christian belief dating back to the fourth century—as the determining factor in whether a person is eligible to join Thrivent. "As a fraternal society we have an application process. People have to apply. And as part of that they attest to believing in the Apostles' Creed," he said. —RNS

Gay bishops urged to 'come out' in Church of England

A leading member of the Church of England has called on gay bishops to "come out" as England celebrated its first same-sex weddings in secular venues.

Alan Wilson, bishop of Buckingham, said the time has come for gay bishops to make themselves known. He criticized the church's stance of not recognizing same-sex marriage as "sheer cruelty" and "morally outrageous," adding: "Most gay people would be happier out, including bishops."

Wilson, 59, said he was not into "outing" gay people. "I don't have a medical file on all my colleagues, but it has been claimed that there are 13 gay bishops in the Church of England," he said.

Same-sex couples were allowed to wed legally at the stroke of midnight on March 29. But the Church of England and the Church in Wales are forbidden from performing same-sex weddings. Bishops have also attempted to ban clergy from entering into same-sex marriages.

Wilson, who is married with five children, referred to a blog written by Colin Coward, director of the gay and lesbian forum Changing Attitude. Coward wrote: "I would confidently name 13 bishops [in the Church of England] as being gay, meaning 10 percent of bishops in England are gay. How any of the 13 live with themselves, their inner world of truth, I can't imagine."



CALLING FOR OPENNESS: Alan Wilson, bishop of Buckingham, said the time has come for gay bishops to make themselves known.

There are currently 100 bishops in the Church of England, a church spokesman said.

Changing Attitude was founded in 1995, and Coward is a regular contributor to Cranmer, a website which often reveals stories—and scandals—not widely known in secular or religious media.

Wilson said he has "sympathy" for gay Church of England bishops. He said these people had to hide their sexuality in order to become bishops in the first place, and to come out could prove "very costly." But not coming out, he added, amounts to "moral cowardice."

"Allowing gay people to marry is good for everybody and I'm delighted," he wrote in a recent issue of the gay weekly newspaper *PinkNews*. "It's time to stop talking about 'gay marriage'—the legal, personal and social reality is simply 'marriage.'"

As gay couples "tied the knot" in civic buildings at the end of March, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said: "I think the church has reacted by fully accepting the right of Parliament to change the law and should react [to gay weddings on March 29] by continuing to demonstrate in word and action the love of Christ for every human being." —Trevor Grundy, RNS

In WikiWorship, lay folks create the sermon

TURNING PART of the message over to church members is the concept behind a new worship model called WikiWorship—*wiki* as in Wikipedia.

It was developed by Philip Chryst, pastor of a United Methodist mission in Wilmington, North Carolina, as part of an evangelism course he took at Duke Divinity School. He was using it as part of a Lenten worship series held at 9:45 a.m. each Sunday in a bar called Hell's Kitchen.

The week before each WikiWorship, participants submit questions on religion, ethics, life, or God via the mission's website. Then Chryst chooses one to spur discussion at each service.

Releasing control of the pulpit without mashing up the message is the challenge, the pastor said.

"WikiWorship, in many ways, is kind of evangelism but in a very postmodern way," Chryst explained. "It's scary like those children's preaching moments in church because you don't know what's going to come out of a child's mouth."

Despite the term *wiki*, no computers are involved at these events. The concept refers to the collaborative nature of the venture, with people taking ownership of the content, in this case sermon ideas and responses.

WikiWorship is less replicable than other evangelism experiments because its success is highly dependent on the skills of the leader, said Duke evangelism professor Stephen Gunter.

"It requires creativity, high energy, high intelligence, and lots of hard work every single week," Gunter wrote in an e-mail. "Chryst has all of the above, and he has worked at this now for half a decade."

Chryst likens the skills needed for WikiWorship to those of a stand-up comedian, ready for whatever comments or questions the audience throws at him or her.

At Hell's Kitchen on March 9, with its Miller Lite sign glowing, band posters plastered on the back wall, and advertisements for the local St. Patrick's Day Kegs and Eggs Bash, Chryst chose a difficult question about non-Christians and damnation.

Chryst asked: "Are Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and other non-Christians damned if they never claim Jesus Christ as their personal savior, even after they have heard about him?"

The pastor answered it first, explaining he does believe in hell and that some people will end up there.

"But all that being said, I don't really have the authority to say yes or no. God does. Let God judge the destiny of people's souls. Ultimately, I'm suspicious of humans who try to decide others' destiny. But the important part of WikiWorship is, I want to hear you."

One by one, people at Chryst's event raised their hands, offering their take on the topic. The pastor walked the microphone out to a crowd of about 50 people in the bar.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill student Christian Bennett told of a recent mission trip he took to Malaysia where, after being mugged and losing his money, a Muslim man he met on the street fed him at a mosque and helped him get home.

"That was a huge testament in my faith," he said, "and to have this man help me like he did and then to have someone say he's not going to heaven, that doesn't add up to me."

Inviting the congregation's opinions and questioning is fulfilling a modern willingness to question faith and is "a great way to engage people who are disengaged with the church," said Gunter. "Attracting them is only the first step, however. You have to then genuinely engage the newcomers by continuing to offer new questions and viable answers."

Afterward, most of the people attending stayed for lunch and asked follow-up questions of the pastor.

"That question could have been a shouting match really, really easily, but it didn't turn out that way," he said.

"I think churches that have guts should be able to say here's the microphone," he added. "I'm not willing to say truth is all relative. I'm just proud to be around a group of people who have the guts to do that." —Amanda Greene, RNS



SERMON CROWDSOURCED: A pub gathering sings hymns and prays during WikiWorship, where the main focus is on theological questions.

Sephardic Jews eager for Spanish citizenship

After the Spanish government recently announced it would grant citizenship to the descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain five centuries ago, Amit Winder of Tel Aviv began dreaming of a bright future on the Costa del Sol.

Winder, a 36-year-old Israeli who runs his own video company, said the high cost of living in Israel and the seemingly never-ending conflict with Palestinians have given him second thoughts.

“I could take all my money to Spain, buy a house and start my business [there],” he said. “That would cost me the same amount as buying a one-bedroom apartment in Tel Aviv.”

Spanish Minister of Justice Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón announced on February 7 a bill that would allow Sephardic Jews dual citizenship, calling it one laden with “deep historic meaning” that would compensate for shameful events in the country’s past.

Spanish Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492 by an edict of the Catholic monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand, during the height of the Spanish Inquisition, an effort intended to maintain Catholic orthodoxy in the kingdom.

Some of the estimated 100,000 to 200,000 Jews living in Spain at the time—historians disagree on the true number—converted to Catholicism and stayed, but the majority migrated to North Africa, the Balkans, and what was then the Ottoman Empire, bringing the Spanish language and culture with them.

Sephardic organizations estimate that as many as 3.5 million Jews could potentially apply for a Spanish passport (out of 14 million Jews in the world). The reaction from the Sephardic community has been huge, partly triggered by an unofficial list of potentially qualifying last names of Spanish origin published by Israeli newspapers.

“The measure is an act of historical justice,” said Sebastián de la Obra, director of Casa de Sefarad, a Córdoba museum and cultural center devoted to Spanish Jewry in the south of the country.

Spanish embassies and Sephardic associations around the world are being inundated with calls and e-mails. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Spain, which according to the draft would be in charge of expediting “Sephardic certificates,” received more than 600 e-mails and untold phone calls in one week, federation officials said.

Sephardic Jews were already able to apply for Spanish citizenship, but the process was long and arduous and forced petitioners to give up their current passports. Observers say the new provision, which would allow applicants to hold dual nationalities, is what has sparked unprecedented interest.

But they warn that the bill still needs to be approved by the Spanish parliament, which could take up to a year.

For the moment, the bill fast-tracks the citizenship process and provides six different ways to prove Sephardic origins, such as “having a Sephardic last name,” “evidence of belonging to the Sephardic community,” or speaking Ladino—a form of medieval Spanish spoken by Sephardic Jews. Once the bill is passed, the Sephardim will have a window of two years to obtain Spanish nationality.

Jews of Spanish heritage have ended up all over the world, and it’s difficult to trace a family tree without ending up with a broken branch. Continuous expulsions, wars, and the Holocaust have made it difficult for families to document their origins.

That’s Winder’s worry. His grandmother’s last name originated from the southern Spanish city of Córdoba, but he cannot trace his maternal ancestors further back than the 17th century. “They all came from Syria,” he explained, guessing that some of his ancestors arrived there after being expelled from Spain in the 15th century.

Part of the bill’s appeal to some is that it would offer applicants an opening to Europe.

“The high expectations created by the government’s announcement are fed by emotions but also by the benefits of getting a European Union passport,” said de la Obra. —Meritxell Mir and Ana Bernal, RNS

Briefly noted

■ Bishop Sally Dyck of Northern Illinois became the third United Methodist bishop to be arrested since President’s Day in an international campaign calling for President Barack Obama to stop deporting immigrants who have no criminal record and to stop separating children from their parents. “We were marching for justice for our own people, members of our congregations and our communities,” Dyck said on March 28. More than 50 Methodist clergy and laity were among the demonstrators, according to the United Methodist News Service. Protesters were issued citations after blocking the entrance to the Chicago Immigration and Customs Enforcement office for 11 minutes. A *New York Times* analysis of internal government records, published April 7, found that two-thirds of the nearly 2 million people deported since Obama took office had committed only minor infractions or had no criminal record. On February 17, Methodist bishops Minerva Carcano and Julius Trimble were among those arrested by U.S. park police in front of the White House as they called for an end to deportations.

■ The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to consider whether a New Mexico photographer could, on free speech grounds, refuse to take photos of a same-sex commitment ceremony. With the high court declining to intervene on April 7, Reuters news service said that an August 2013 New Mexico Supreme Court decision against the company remains intact. Albuquerque-based Elane Photography had said its free speech rights under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution should be a valid defense against the state’s finding that it violated the New Mexico Human Rights Act. The law, similar to laws in 20 other states, bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The company’s owners, Elaine and Jonathan Huguenin, are Christians who oppose gay marriage. They argued that since taking photographs may be seen as a form of speech, the First Amendment protects them from being required to “express messages that conflict with their religious beliefs,” their attorneys said in court papers.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, May 4

Luke 24:13–35

LATELY, I HAVE spent hours each day surveying my newborn son's face. While he sleeps I examine his fine eyelashes, note the flush of his cheek, and watch as his expressions swiftly shift. When he's awake, I covet the moments when he stares into my eyes. When his gaze wanders elsewhere, I turn to see where he is looking, trying to discern what captures his attention.

He can see clearly only what is eight to 12 inches from his face. But this does not keep him from searching beyond this field of clear vision, and he often stares intently where I don't think there's much for him to see: at a bare wall, or a particular shelf in our bookcase, or the base of an unremarkable lamp. His attention draws mine, and I see details I would not otherwise have noticed. The bare wall is in fact marked by a broad stripe of shadow. On the bookshelf, a star of light winks from the corner of a glossy dust jacket. The slender, straight lines of the lamp's base create a black-and-white pattern on the wall.

Much of what passes into the range of our sight doesn't register. This is a matter of survival. We begin life unable to organize and categorize our sensory experience. Our blurry, weak vision as infants protects us from an assault of incomprehensible light, color, and movement. But eventually we develop the capacity to cope with all of these stimuli by focusing on some of them and ignoring the rest. Our eyes drink in the world around us, but our brains develop filters so that we actually see only the necessary things.

In their conversation on the road to Emmaus, I imagine the two disciples sifting carefully through what they themselves have seen and what they have heard from others throughout the week before. They are trying to discern the necessary things to help them understand what has happened—and what they are to do in the wake of such loss and disappointment.

When a fellow traveler approaches and asks what they are discussing, they list for him those "things about Jesus of Nazareth" that seem most important: Jesus' identity and betrayal, their hopes, the rumors of his resurrection, and the tomb—found empty, just as the women reported. It is a decent summary of the important details, but the traveler finds it lacking. He reminds them at length of the promises of redemption found in the scriptures. Yet the disciples still do not recognize that the one speaking to them is Jesus. They look, but they do not see.

Finally, when Jesus sits with the disciples at their table, takes the bread, and blesses and breaks it, their eyes are opened. They recognize the pattern of his movements; they feel the familiar

pull of the holy drawing them into communion, embracing them. They see Jesus.

The summer after my sophomore year in college, I moved home to work and save money in preparation for living abroad the next semester. I also volunteered at a fair-trade gift store operated by the local Mennonite congregation. Occasionally the church's pastor came in to do the books or check inventory, and we often fell into conversation. After two years of global studies and economics courses, I was full of righteous zeal for every kind of cause for justice. I'm sure I spoke passionately about current events, environmental catastrophe, and all manner of situations of injustice around the world.

Then one day, Pastor Long asked a question I could not answer: "What examples of injustice do you see around here?" After a pause—long enough to allow me to respond, but not so long as to unkindly underscore my inability to—he began to speak about the migrant workers in the nearby orchards and fields of eastern Washington. He told me about the poverty they left behind in their home countries and the discrimination and harsh living and working conditions they faced in the United States. As he spoke, my eyes were opened: I realized that I had spent the first 18 years of my life *not seeing* a whole group of people who shared space in the place I called home. Even when I returned home with a growing passion for justice, the blinders that had limited my vision in my childhood and youth remained.

I cannot fault the disciples for not recognizing the risen Christ. Left on my own, my vision is like theirs, or like my infant son's—blurred, blocked, and incomplete. My conversation with Pastor Long was, for me, an Emmaus experience: a moment of stark recognition that altered my perception. It changed what and who I noticed that summer.

But it was just one experience. My vision needs retuning all the time. So I find comfort in the Emmaus story: Jesus does not leave the disciples on their own, blind to the reality of resurrection. In their grief they cannot see enough to go looking for him, so he finds them. He walks with them and takes a place at their table—though they do not recognize him. In the breaking of bread, he opens their eyes to his presence with them all along. And the filters are stripped away—filters of disappointment, loss, isolation, and fear that kept them from seeing.

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, Simon has also seen Jesus. When Cleopas and his companion crash breathlessly into the room, they all clutch at one another's arms, and their words tumble out together: "Jesus is risen!" Together they become the seeds of a new community whose seeing has been transformed; together they will continue to witness signs of the resurrection and to see the presence of Christ all around.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, May 11

Acts 2:42–47

FOR YOU. Of all the things I've learned in seminary and in ministry, the power of these two words is among the most important. Luther emphasizes this in his Small Catechism, where he insists that there is nothing people can do to make themselves worthy of communion:

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require all hearts to believe.

Those words "for you" carry the weight of this impossible, unbelievable mystery: that the Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, gives a whit about every single person who approaches the table. It's the mystery of the infinite, unknowable, whole, and holy one who yearns for us—and reaches out to us through bread and wine to make us whole, too. Those two words make a claim on each person who receives; they call each of us to trust that God has acted in Christ *for us*.

I may have encountered this passage from Luther in confirmation class. I certainly heard those words every Sunday as I held out my cupped hands: "Body of Christ, given for you." But I was 14 years old, and while I may have worried about not having the right kind of jeans and whether or not Jason Q. would ask me to dance, I did not worry about being worthy to receive communion. I had never been made to feel unworthy, at the communion rail or anywhere else. I knew my family loved me, and I felt loved at church, too.

For my seminary field education I was assigned to a small, vibrant congregation in San Francisco, St. Francis Lutheran Church. It was there that I began to grasp the power and importance of the words "for you."

St. Francis has long been marked by its welcome to all people and by the conviction that "gay people are as much a part of the body of Christ as anyone." Many members have experienced rejection and injury at other churches, at school, sometimes in their family homes. They have been made to feel unworthy. As I came to know the people of St. Francis, I felt a sense of urgency during the distribution of communion. Each time I held out a ragged piece of bread or lifted the chalice, I began to speak those words more deliberately and firmly: "This is the body of Christ, given for you."

Communion is one of the essential early church practices that Luke describes in Acts 2. After the whirling, chattering outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, the disciples and 3,000 new believers grew into a community marked by study, prayer, radical economic sharing, regular worship, and the breaking of bread—which I understand to mean both the sacrament and ordinary meals.

Luke's snapshot is at once familiar and strange. Study, prayer, worship, communion, and potlucks—pick up any church newsletter and you'll see reports of all these practices. The obvious outlier is outlined in verses 44–45: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need."

These two verses seem to electrify readers—some find the practice inspiring; others see it as utopian foolishness. If we believe this is in any way a model for how to respond today to the promptings of the Holy Spirit—how to live as the body of Christ—this passage should make most of us uncomfortable. It describes a practice of sharing that is far more sacrificial than even our most generous pledges, one that demands a profound reordering of our relationship to our stuff and our neighbors.

Luke's report of the church's economic sharing interrupts our reading of what might otherwise be an easy passage. Perhaps it might also help us recognize the challenge of those practices that seem so familiar. Communion also makes

Communion makes uncomfortable demands on us.

uncomfortable demands on us, invites and tugs us into new relationships. Luther wrote of communion as a sacrament of love wherein we are joined to Christ and to our neighbors; their burdens, sorrows, and hopes become ours.

When we step forward to receive the bread and wine, we hear those two powerful words: "for you." They carry to us God's promises for redemption, forgiveness, and abundant life. Then we move along, and the person behind us steps forward—and we hear those words again. All at once we are reminded that God's promises are for each of us and yet not for any one of us alone. It's not an individual affirmation but an invitation to sit down at a table with all the other broken, hungry sinners. And as we sit at that table, we might just find ourselves a little bit less attached to some of our stuff and a little more open to sharing with our neighbor.

The author is Yvette Schock, who is associate pastor at Faith Lutheran Church in Arlington, Virginia.

The pastor and other sinners

by David J. Wood

ON A RECENT VISIT with Eugene Peterson, I asked him, “What was the turning point? When did you realize that you were called to pastoral life rather than a life in the academy?”

The question was prompted by my realization of just how well suited he was for the academy in his formative years. Graduate school had revealed a passion and an exceptional aptitude for biblical languages. Upon graduation from the Biblical Seminary in New York (now New York Theological Seminary), he entered the Ph.D. program at Johns Hopkins to study Semitic languages with William F. Albright. When Albright retired only two years into Peterson’s course work, he recommended Peterson to his colleague Brevard Childs at Yale for a Ph.D. in Old Testament. After meeting with Peterson, Childs accepted him into the program and awarded him a generous stipend. Peterson was thriving in the academy and on track to become an accomplished biblical scholar.

So what turned the tide? In preparation for his work at Yale, Peterson took a position as associate professor at New York Theological Seminary. In addition, he became a part-time associate pastor at a Presbyterian church in suburban White Plains. He admired the senior pastor and the way he led his congregation. But that was not the tipping point.

The tipping point was when Peterson was asked to teach the book of Revelation at New York Theological Seminary. Up to that point, he had been teaching only Hebrew and Greek. As the course progressed, he became captivated by the pastoral character of the narrative. Revelation is a letter by a pastor to his seven congregations. The local context and the texture of the congregation animated the text in ways that Peterson’s learning and teaching of languages had not. This experience in the classroom, combined with his encounter with the congregation in White Plains, took hold. He became convinced that the congregation was where the action was. It was there that the Word became flesh and fresh. It was there that salvation history was being made. Peterson wanted to be in on it. He did not leave behind the passion for learning and teaching that he had discovered in the academy; rather, he wanted to place that learning in an immediate pastoral context.

What, then, could be more fitting than for a group of mostly pastors and a few academics to produce a volume reflecting on Peterson’s work in the congregation? *Pastoral Work: Engagements with the Vision of Eugene Peterson*, edited by Jason Byassee and L. Roger Owens, is just that. The editors



Pastoral Work: Engagements with the Vision of Eugene Peterson
Edited by Jason Byassee and L. Roger Owens
Cascade, 222 pp., \$24.00 paperback

promote the book of essays as “appreciative, critical, and constructive engagements with Peterson’s own vision of the pastoral vocation.” It is a well-crafted collection that includes contributions from Lillian Daniel, Martin Copenhaver, Stephanie Paulsell, Anthony Robinson, Kyle Childress, Carol Howard Merritt, and William Willimon. The best essays reflect from within pastoral life, elaborating on how the authors’ reading of Peterson has directly shaped, clarified, challenged, or oriented their own pastoral work.

Peterson cast his lot with the congregation.

The 17 essays are organized into four sections: “Words”—exploring how the Word and words are pivotal for Peterson; “Institutions”—focusing on his sustained critique of institutional life and leadership; “People”—taking up Peterson’s emphasis on the importance of relationships to pastoral life; and “Life”—reflecting on how Peterson’s vision of pastoral work creates a context for flourishing and integrity.

Implicit in these essays is an appreciation for how Peterson’s background suffuses his vision of pastoral work. He is a bona fide intellectual casting his lot with the congregation, bringing everything he has acquired—whether by nature or nurture. He does not speak as one who has figured it all out. He is a fellow traveler navigating the worlds of scripture, congregation, denomination culture, and “soggy suburbia.” His books are not laced with extended footnotes or endnotes, yet we sense that we were reading someone who is widely read and well practiced. Just how widely read he is became clear only with his publication of *Take and Read: Spiritual Reading—An Annotated List* in 1995.

For Peterson, the congregation is capacious and generative, not a place destined to suck the life out of a pastor. It is a place,

if engaged well, where one can thrive. The congregation is a nexus of God's interaction with the world.

How have readers come to learn of Peterson's unique take on the congregation? Because he wrote. For all his talk of the temptation to wrongful ambition, he managed to publish more than a dozen books while serving as a pastor. His books that deal directly with pastoral life and work—which account for less than 25 percent of his total output—display how scripture provides the contours and character of pastoral life, imagination, and practice. He gives pastors a sense for what it means to take themselves, their work, and their congregations seriously. His narrations give content and specificity to what is meant by a “learned ministry”—one marked by a love of learning, reading, writing, praying, preaching, and dwelling deeply in time and place.

Peterson talks often of the remarkable freedom that pastors have to shape their own lives. That congregants do not know what their pastors are called to be about is not cause for despair, self-pity, or whining; that reality sets the conditions for agency, witness, and leadership. Instead of focusing on a functional view of pastoral life, Peterson evokes an imagination of what pastoral life can be like if one is given wholly to the right things in the right way. Pastors need to resist the temptation to accommodate themselves to the expectations of their congregations, which he assumes are off the mark. Furthermore, if pastors are to be true to their calling, their purpose and identity must not be oriented by an estimation of what counts in the larger culture. To be sure, the arena of the congregation can be reductive, even trivializing, but Peterson's sustained argument is that it is not necessarily so. The enduring possibility is that the givens of pastoral life can become a gift.

Navigating the landscape of congregational life is no simple matter. Take this passage about the context of pastoral work, from *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, as an example:

It means living hopefully among people who from time to time get flickering glimpses of the Glory but then live through stretches, sometimes long ones, of unaccountable grayness. Most pastoral work takes place in obscurity: deciphering grace in the shadows, searching out meaning in a difficult text, blowing on the embers of a hard-used life. This is hard work and not conspicuously glamorous.

Peterson is fiercely critical of any and all that gets in the way of pastoral work. Whether it be denominational hierarchy or consumerist, success-oriented, self-indulgent American culture, it comes within the scope of his withering critique. He does not offer a sentimental, romantic view of congregational life either: a congregation is not a demarcated zone of idealized community. Pastors are sinners working among sinners. The potential for misdirection and distraction abounds. The solution is not boundary making; nor is it adoption of practices from other culturally legitimized worlds, such as the clinic, the corporation, or the academy. Rather than defensively setting the boundaries of self-protection that are so blithely urged on seminarians these days, Peterson calls on pastors to cultivate a personal gravitational center from which to develop skills of involvement. Attention to the narrative world of scripture, the

practice of prayer, and the sacredness of time, place, and conversation are at the heart of such cultivation.

Ironically, the strongly personal dimension of much of Peterson's work, his emphasis on the importance of being a pastor in a very particular place, earns him the most criticism from the contributors to *Pastoral Work*. Authors' substantive concerns include these questions: Does Peterson's critique of pastor as manager or strategist leave us with an anemic view of pastor as leader? Does his sustained case for pastoral stability—for resisting the siren song to move to greener congregational pastures—fail to account for the importance of discerning when leaving is essential to vocational holiness? Is his vision of pastoral work and integrity applicable to pastors in

Congregations offer pastors abundant opportunities to get distracted.

larger congregations? Does Peterson's notion of the contemplative life lack an understanding of contemplative practice?

Peterson's emphasis on locality and interiority also draws critical attention. Does Peterson encourage the view that pastoral life and work are isolated from or even antagonistic to institutional life—ecclesial or otherwise? Is his focus on interiority and locality insufficiently attentive to the external conditions in which ministry is practiced these days?

The essay by William Willimon, while not lacking in appreciation, goes the farthest in developing a critique of what he terms Peterson's “scorn for the institutional framework for ministry.” Anyone familiar with Willimon's own writing cannot help feeling the irony of this critique coming from his pen. In his essay, Willimon speaks very much like the bishop he became, and far less like the iconoclastic pastor of his earlier years. But because Willimon's critique is echoed in several other essays, it's worthy of further consideration.

Willimon is correct to point out that Peterson does not highlight or advocate ecclesial institutional life beyond the congregation. However, it certainly remains implicit in his pastoral identity as an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and in his explicit insistence that pastors be connected to friends and colleagues beyond the local congregation. Peterson does not encourage pastors to delegate responsibility for their own growth and flourishing to congregations or larger ecclesial bodies, nor does he call for them to extricate themselves from denominational bodies.

Peterson's lack of emphasis on this dimension of pastoral life and identity is perhaps to be expected when you cross a Pentecostal with a Presbyterian—the call to order, tradition, and connectionalism is embraced, but the impulse to autonomy and locality remains strong. Peterson's focus is squarely on pastor and congregation. Whether his lack of a constructive

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discussion of institutions rises to the level of indictment that Willimon suggests will be a matter of ongoing debate. At the very least, however, ecclesial bodies would do well to consider what it means to encourage conditions conducive to the formation and flourishing of pastoral life exemplified by Peterson.

The criticisms included in most of these essays read like addenda to extended appreciative reflections. The writers are familiar with Peterson's body of work and are grateful for how it has shaped their own understanding and practice. Stephanie Paulsell affirms his articulation of a pastoral life that is "prayerful, improvisational, steeped in Scripture, and psychologically astute." Mark Ralls celebrates his practice of a "hermeneutics of adoration" as an alternative to "a hermeneutics of suspicion."

From reading Peterson, Trygve David Johnson learned to ask three daily questions of himself: "Did I love my people? Did I love my place? And did I love the Word?" As a pastor, Anthony Robinson was reminded that pastors are called "to attend to God, to place God at the center, to place ourselves at the center that is God." Jason Byassee has high praise for the exceptional way Peterson "combines the reading of Scripture and the living of the Christian life between church and academy."

Carol Howard Merritt appreciates the way that Peterson "calls out amongst the discontent that surrounds us and encourages pastoral leaders to set aside the careerism that can

engulf us." Kyle Childress writes that he learned from Peterson how important being "patient, local, and personal" is to being both pastoral and prophetic. Lillian Daniel found in the Peterson corpus a narrative of pastoral life that is "not a ten-step, one-size-fits-all plan, but one man's story, bravely shared with a reader he trusted to have the intelligence to sort through the details rather than be spoon-fed a list of rules."

The range of criticism and appreciation expressed in these essays demonstrates how Peterson's body of work can become an occasion for generative reflection on pastoral life—reflection that draws deeply from the well of one pastor's understanding and practice and draws us into a shared tradition of sources and experience. As personal and idiosyncratic as his vision may be, it resonates with pastoral experience across a wide range of ecclesial traditions.

There is only passing reference in these essays to Peterson's description of "The Badlands"—a period in his pastoral life that he recounts most extensively in *Under the Unpredictable Plant* and *The Pastor*. His description of this six-year period has all the earmarks of an experience akin to situational depression. From these accounts we learn how crucial constancy is to pastoral character. As strange as it sounds, my reading of them years ago was enormously encouraging. It helped me to narrate my own experience—both emotional and conceptual—of the struggle, restlessness, and wrestling that has been part and parcel of my pastoral life.

Given the congregational, institutional, and cultural conditions under which we operate these days, I don't trust pastors who do not encounter days, weeks, months, even years of struggle. But Peterson persisted in hope—putting one foot in front of the other. To our great benefit, his writing was crucial to his progress. He wrote not to escape the dissonance or withdraw from the nexus of Word and flesh, but to probe it, understand it, plumb it, and, finally, abide by it. As he puts it, "It's like I sailed into clear air." Not because he had figured out how to ride above it all, but because he had figured out how to tack in those crosscurrents and choppy seas. He learned to thrive within them—working at the local level, persisting with the quotidian practices that strapped him to the mast of pastoral life, and thereby discovering that in that liminal space between Word and flesh lay the sacred, unfolding story of salvation.

In Peterson's later years, there is an unmistakable sense of coming full circle. Upon leaving Christ Our King Presbyterian Church after 29 years, he returned to the academy—first to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and then to Regent College in Vancouver. No move could have been more fitting. Along with teaching courses on the pastoral life, his primary focus was the biblical languages. It was in these years that he took on the task of translating the Bible, the outcome of which was *The Message*. His lifelong pas-

Fluid mechanics

Sitting in a chapel high in the golden sculpted hills of California
A few minutes before Mass I reach down to a small wooden box
By my chair, where missals and songbooks are stored, and I find
A set of ancient eyeglasses folded into an old cloth case, so worn
That it feels like a pelt, and I realize that my chair must belong to
A certain sister here at the old mission. Maybe she's here at Mass,
Trying not to be peeved that I snagged her seat. After Mass I ask
Around and a sweet nun with a cane says oh no, dear, that's Sister
Maureen Mary's seat. She passed over two years ago. She was tall
And hilarious and subject to fits of darkness. She'd been a student
Of engineering, a really brilliant girl, when she decided to join our
Community. Her parents were appalled, or as Sister Maureen likes
To say, aghast. She became a wonderful teacher with us. When she
Died we got hundreds of notes from her former students. Teachers
Have to cultivate the long view, as Sister said herself. You haven't
Much immediate evidence of your labors. But you get flashes, here
And there, and hugs at the end of the year, she would say. She was
Still an engineer, she said—still actually working in fluid mechanics.
Her mom and dad began to visit once a year and then once a month.
Her sister never visited even once although she sent money. Sister's
Parents died and willed us the truck in which they came to visit their
Daughter. We use it all over the place. You'll see it go by today, for
Certain. When Sister died we left her glasses there just for moments
Like this, when someone discovers her. Often it is us, of course, and
We laugh, but then you spend the rest of the day remembering Sister
Maureen Mary, who is a most remarkable soul, whom I miss terribly.

Brian Doyle

toral work prepared him to take up the language of scripture in a way he could not have if he had never made the turn to the congregation he did so many years ago. His translation of the Bible, perhaps more than any of his other works, brings together his love of the Word and his passion for the Word to take on flesh in people's lives.

Peterson's turn toward a larger lay audience is no less evident in his five books on spiritual theology: *Eat This Book*, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, *The Jesus Way*, *Practice Resurrection*, and *Tell It Slant*. In these volumes, as in *The Message* and so many of his other books, we pastors are less the audience than the observers—bearing witness to a pastor at work with his flock.

There was no grand plan for Peterson to one day translate the New and Old Testaments, sell a millions of copies, and retire. He and his wife of over 50 years, Jan, had sketched a future in which they would someday wind up on Flathead Lake in Montana. They just kept making their “intently haphazard” way—Peterson's favorite metaphor for the pastoral life. They now live a modest and eloquent life on the shores of Flathead Lake in a home built by Peterson's father in the 1940s and remodeled by them in the 1990s. There is an enduring congruity, coherence,

and fullness to his life and their life together, with more reading than writing these days (although a book of sermons is in the making), even less traveling, and almost no speaking engagements. He and Jan are at peace and are as mindful, soulful, and vital as ever, thriving in the rhythms of life they have practiced over many years. There is no table more eucharistic than the one that sits in their dining room—situated between kitchen and fireplace with a clear view of the exquisite beauty of Flathead and the Rockies.

Few have inhabited the pastoral life as well as Eugene and Jan. None have disclosed more its depth and promise. **CC**

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Old Testament

***Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, by Carol Meyers** (Oxford University Press, 312 pp., \$24.95 paperback). A distinguished archaeologist, Meyers first published *Discovering Eve* in 1988, using cultural anthropology, ethnography, and archaeology to reconstruct the everyday lives of Israelite women in ancient times. Since then a dramatic increase in the amount of available information about ancient Israel has compelled her not merely to update the prior book, but to outline anew what is known about ancient households and the economic, reproductive, sociopolitical, and religious activities shaping women's lives.



***Israel's Poetry of Resistance: Africana Perspectives on Early Hebrew Verse*, by Hugh R. Page Jr.** (Fortress, 120 pp., \$32.00 paperback). A prominent African-American scholar reads Israel's earliest poems alongside black experience in America, including the author's own upbringing in Baltimore close to Johns Hopkins University, the center of much scholarly discovery concerning this literature. Offering rich translations of the poetry, Page reads the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15) in concert with Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) in connection with freedom fighter Harriet Tubman, and several other well-known early poems with other movements and moments in Africana. He concludes with reflections relating this ancient poetry to black resistance spirituality.



***When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible*, by Timothy Michael Law** (Oxford University Press, 240 pp., \$24.95 paperback). The Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible arose among diasporic Jews in Hellenistic times and continued its preeminence for gentile Christianity until the fourth century, when Jerome translated the Bible directly from Hebrew to Latin. Despite its eclipse, the Septuagint has had deep and lasting effects on Christian theology and biblical interpretation. In lively prose, Law traces its fascinating story, suggesting that the Septuagint has been wrongfully neglected.

***Portraits of a Mature God: Choices in Old Testament Theology*, by Mark McEntire** (Fortress, 256 pp., \$39.00). In this readable, interesting, succinct, and pastorally significant theology of God, McEntire emphasizes the God portrayed in the later books of the Old Testament, "the God at the end of the story," a character who develops over time to become, finally, a restoring God who "moves in the shadows, indirectly influencing events, and does not perform 'mighty acts'"—a God more recognizable to contemporary worshipers than earlier versions.

***The Lord of the Psalms*, by Patrick D. Miller** (Westminster John Knox, 132 pp., \$25.00 paperback). This gentle, conversational, sophisticated, and pastoral book explores the representation of God in the book of Psalms. Important themes include the reality of God, God's standing in the cosmic order, body language regarding God, God as Creator, memory and hope, and divine mercy.

***Chasing Mystery: A Catholic Biblical Theology*, by Carey Walsh** (Liturgical Press, 168 pp., \$19.95 paperback). With the aim of addressing contemporary spiritual need, this enchantingly written book explores the ways various scriptural passages and genres negotiate, through mystical encounters, the problem of divine presence and absence. Walsh presents scripture's sly program of wonder initiated in Genesis 1—its library of religious experiences which prompt us to pay attention to our own theologies. Sensitizing readers to the mystery underlying numinous encounters with God, she invites them to notice the burning bushes and humble mangers in our own lives.

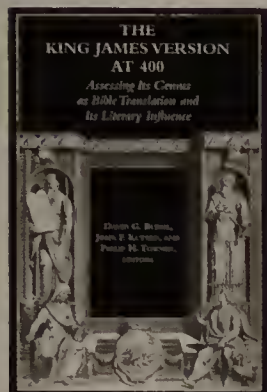
***The Nature of Creation: Examining the Bible and Science*, by Mark Harris** (Acumen, 224 pp., \$29.95 paperback). Harris carefully examines the thorny theological issues that are raised when biblical creation accounts are read alongside contemporary evolutionary science. Although the idea of God as Creator suffuses the whole Bible, it is best to read the Bible in conjunction with, and not in opposition to, scientific understandings of the world. Harris's book raises the level of discussion far past arguments about the



Selected by Patricia K. Tull, who taught Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and is author of the recently released Inhabiting Eden: Christians, the Bible, and the Ecological Crisis (Westminster John Knox).

age of the earth and the provability of intelligent design and shows how scientific developments can sharpen our reading of scriptural cosmologies.

Parental Guidance Advised: Adult Preaching from the Old Testament, edited by Alyce M. McKenzie and Charles L. Aaron Jr. (Chalice, 160 pp., \$24.99 paperback). Professors and preachers team up to offer a provocative book that raises the Old Testament from neglect and presents Jonah's comic elements, the biblical God's lovingkindness, the realism of flawed biblical characters, scripture's vivid eroticism, and several other themes that intersect with 21st-century concerns.



The King James Version at 400: Assessing Its Genius as Bible Translation and Its Literary Influence, edited by David G. Burke, John F. Kutsko, and Philip H. Towner (Society of Biblical Literature, 580 pp., \$61.95 paperback). Thirty-two prominent scholars discuss the significance of the King James Bible, from its history and inception to its impact on the English language, Christian liturgy, Jewish translation, civil religion, and biblical interpretation around the world in the past four centuries.

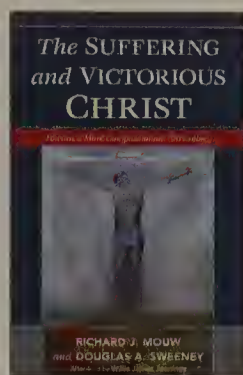
The Dead Sea Scrolls, by Peter W. Flint (Abingdon, 248 pp., \$29.99 paperback). In this well-structured, readable, comprehensive introduction to the Dead Sea Scrolls and their discovery, contents, and significance, Flint explains what was found, where and when, and how it has been interpreted. He explores the Jewish movements active at the time of the scrolls' composition, citing several early writers' descriptions of the Essene community, and discusses the religious thought and practice reflected in the scrolls. Comparisons of the scrolls with parts of the New Testament conclude the book.

Theology

Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation, by Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda (Fortress, 309 pp., \$22.00 paperback). Moe-Lobeda's Lutheran acknowledgment of the moral ambiguity of all human action does not deter her from calling for an ethic of love that aims at forging just and sustainable relations between humans and the earth. Her argument is presented in a clear, accessible style and is interspersed with compelling stories.



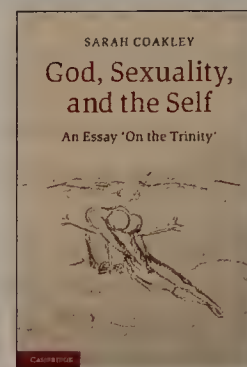
Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son, by Richard Lischer (Knopf, 272 pp., \$25.00). In this unflinching memoir of his son's death, Lischer offers profound theological reflections on baptism, sanctification, and the interplay of faith and doubt.



The Suffering and Victorious Christ: Toward a More Compassionate Christology, by Richard J. Mouw and Douglas A. Sweeney (Baker Academic, 128 pp., \$19.99 paperback). Two white evangelicals think aloud about the strengths and shortcomings of their Reformational traditions and commend the insights of Asian and African-American Christians into the suffering and sorrows of Christ.

The afterword by theologian Willie Jennings is both appreciative and critical, and not to be missed.

God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity", by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge University Press, 384 pp., \$29.99 paperback). This first volume in Coakley's ambitious project in systematic theology enters trinitarian reflection by way of the Spirit's promised intercession in prayer and includes field studies of two congregations. Her theology aims for "an attentive openness of the whole self" to the reality of God. She writes for general readers as well as trained theologians, but everyone will find this an intellectually demanding book.



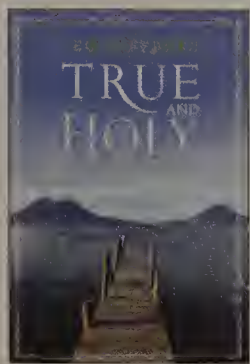
The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety and Public Witness, by Raphael G. Warnock (New York University Press, 276 pp., \$30.00). Warnock, the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, calls for a renewed synergism between the liberationist impulse of black and womanist theologies and the evangelical piety of the black church. Only when these two forces realign, he contends, can the black church sustain a consistent "over-againstness" in the face of evil and injustice.

Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology, by Andrew Louth (IVP Academic, 172 pp., \$20.00 paperback). This book started out as a series of public lectures, and some of the personal and direct style of those talks remains. Louth, an emeritus professor and Russian Orthodox priest, combines a deft account of the history of the Orthodox tradition with an insider's appreciation of its practices of worship and prayer.

The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators, by Katharina von Kellenbach (Oxford University Press, 304 pp., \$35.00). This extensively researched

Selected by Amy Plantinga Pauw, who teaches theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and is general editor for the Westminster John Knox theological commentary series Belief.

study concludes that among Nazi perpetrators, truthful memory of their own deeds and open recognition of their victims' suffering have been very rare. In the face of this pervasive denial of guilt, von Kellenbach argues that Christian calls for forgiveness and closure are inadequate. She advocates Christian penitential practices that, like the mark of Cain, set perpetrators on a path of moral repair that is open and transparent.

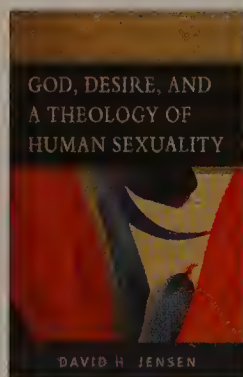


***True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions*, by Leo Lefebure** (Orbis, 224 pp., \$30.00 paperback). Lefebure, a Catholic priest and veteran of interreligious dialogue, takes up the urgent task of interpreting Christian scripture in relation to other religions. While acknowledging the historical predominance of hostile and adversarial patterns of biblical interpretation, he argues

that the Bible contains resources for respectful and generous interfaith engagement and lifts up hopeful signs of a positive hermeneutical shift in Christian relations with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

***Selections from Revelations of Divine Love—Annotated and Explained*, by Julian of Norwich** (SkyLight Paths, 224 pp., \$16.99 paperback). A few lines from the writings of the 14th-century theologian Julian of Norwich have become so familiar that they appear on greeting cards. These selections from her central work, introduced by Roberta C. Bondi and generously annotated by Mary C. Earle, are an opportunity for the non-specialist to take a big next step in understanding Julian's thought and context.

***God, Desire, and a Theology of Human Sexuality*, by David H. Jensen** (Westminster John Knox, 170 pp., \$20.00 paperback). Jensen constructs his theology of human sexuality in interaction with Christian doctrines of Trinity, incarnation, resurrection, eschatology, sacraments, and vocation. The result is a theologically rich account that asks hard questions about both traditional Christian teaching and contemporary sexual mores and sets Christians on a path of discernment.

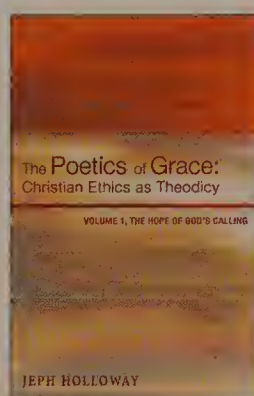
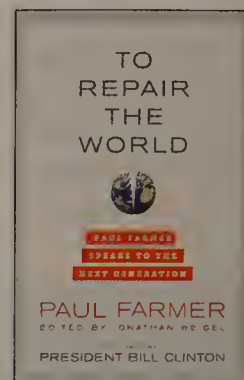


Ethics

***Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology*, by Jennifer R. Ayres** (Baylor University Press, 248 pp., \$34.95). Ayres presents good food as divine bounty and moral challenge. She rotates her crops, deftly weaving statistical analysis and moral frameworks with stories of particular practices of food faithful-

ness, hopefulness, and goodness. In the second half of the book she recounts particular practices of "church-supported farming, . . . transformative travel, and vocational sustainability." Caught in a bad system yet hoping for an eschatological feast, we must both endure and repair, repent and rejoice, theologize more honestly, and act more faithfully. Ayres shows us the way.

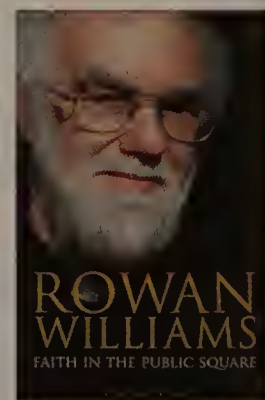
***To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation*, by Paul Farmer** (University of California Press, 294 pp., \$26.95). From nearly anyone else, a collection of 19 sermons and graduation speeches would be overwhelming. From Farmer, it is a beguiling, enervating prescription for accompaniment—the "go and do likewise" walk with hurting people toward Jesus' future. Though Farmer jokes about being "as poetic as Heaney, as funny as Colbert, as engaging as Clinton, as creative as J. K. Rowling," this poignant, hilarious, winsome, fascinating book gives us a sense of the urgency—and joy—of the corporal works of mercy.



***The Poetics of Grace: Christian Ethics as Theodicy*, by Jeph Holloway** (Cascade, 304 pp., \$33.00 paperback). Holloway proffers an ingenious evangelical ethic that begins with the core question, "What is God doing about evil?" The answer, according to Holloway's close reading of Ephesians 1–3, is that God is redeeming a church. That answer shapes successive chapters on the theocentric, redemptive, and eccle-

sial character of Christian ethics. Along the way, Holloway offers crisp readings of philosophical history and current events, of Paul's engagement with ancient Ephesus and his own with pop culture, and of the moral contours of work, eugenics, and home life.

***Faith in the Public Square*, by Rowan Williams** (Bloomsbury, 352 pp., \$29.95). Williams is a master of teasing out connections between public questions and core Christian claims about creation and redemption. The 26 public lectures collected here show that religious groups and their enemies often share the same confusions about matters like secularism and pluralism, that Christians ought to notice the sacramental connections between environment and economy, and that the "givenness" of the world invites and enables us to let go of fantasies of control.



Selected by Brent Laytham, who teaches theology at the Ecumenical Institute of Theology, St. Mary's Seminary and University, Baltimore.

***Listening to Popular Music*, by Don Compier** (Fortress, 128 pp., \$15.00 paperback). Alternatively light and profound, Compier invites us into reflective engagement with the soundtrack of our lives. The book has the requisite review of pop music's all too pervasive racism, sexism, and consumerism, along with expositions of musical prophets, such as John Lennon, who denounced those sins. After succinctly reviewing the fear of music in the Christian tradition, he recommends recognizing music's spiritual power to deepen our affectivity and enliven our imagination. Compier shows how pop music inculcates "joy, compassion, attentiveness and wisdom" by sharing his own.



***Citizen of the World: Suffering and Solidarity in the 21st Century*, by Donald H. Dunson and James A. Dunson III** (Orbis, 192 pp., \$22.00 paperback). Here is a sympathetic dialogue between a philosopher and a priest in which the strongest arguments against cosmopolitanism serve as counterpoint to poignant stories of "suffering and solidarity" in Kenya, Uganda, Mumbai, and Calcutta. Rich with cultural allusions from Dostoevsky and

Dickens, *The Office* and *The Onion*, this book shows how moral argument, emotion, and personal experience fail to justify and motivate solidarity with distant neighbors. It succeeds as a "spiritual exercise . . . to cultivate not just a live heart but a live mind as well."

***Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, by Gary A. Anderson** (Yale University Press, 232 pp., \$30.00). Anderson's strangely amazing book resituates our understanding of something we thought we understood well: the central place of charity—giving alms to the poor—in biblical faith. Rereading scripture and the tradition of its reception, Anderson shows that acts of charity are both sacramental (the poor person is an altar) and storable (as treasure in heaven) and that they are hardly the "works righteousness" of Protestant caricature.

***Where Justice and Mercy Meet: Catholic Opposition to the Death Penalty*, edited by Vicki Schieber, Trudy D. Conway, and David Matzko McCarthy** (Liturgical Press, 248 pp., \$18.95 paperback). The editors deftly weave story, description, and analysis to introduce and review the 16 contributions to this collection, creat-

ing a coherent, compelling Christian argument against the death penalty in the United States. The heart of the argument is theological, rooted in rich exposition of liturgical practice, scripture, tradition, and church teaching.



***To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*, by Evgeny Morozov** (PublicAffairs, 432 pp., \$17.99 paperback). These days the cultural dream factory shaping our minds is located more in Silicon Valley than in Hollywood. "Digital heretic" Morozov unveils the digital utopia—the "amelioration orgy"—by critiquing "solutionism" and "Internet-centrism." He suggests that we are better off with

"imperfection, ambiguity, opacity, disorder, and the opportunity to err."

***Should We Live Forever? The Ethical Ambiguities of Aging*, by Gilbert Meilaender** (Eerdmans, 135 pp., \$18.00 paperback). In a short book that is long on insight, Meilaender wrestles with the ambiguities surfaced by scientific interventions to prolong life. He focuses his reflection on three aspects of a virtuous life—generativity, patience, and completeness—and concludes that Easter is better than endlessly living this life.

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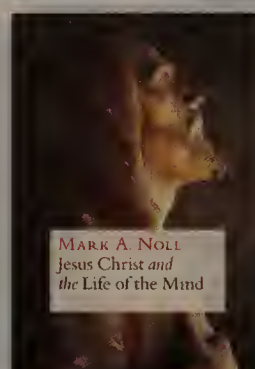
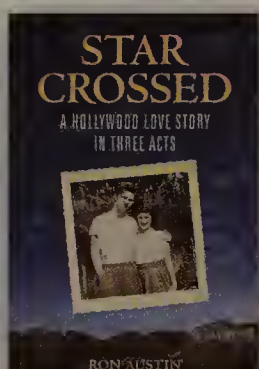
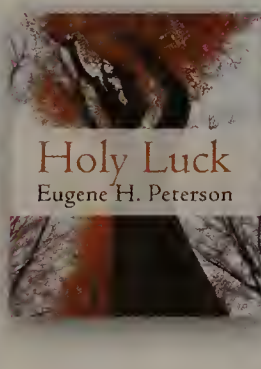
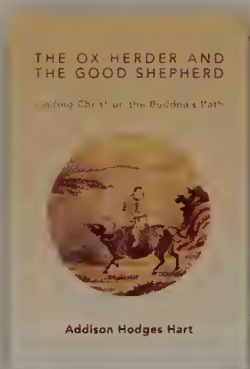
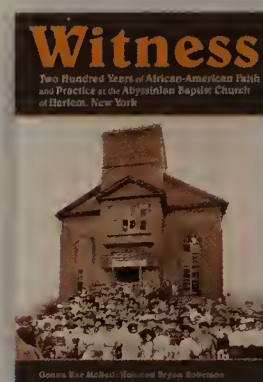
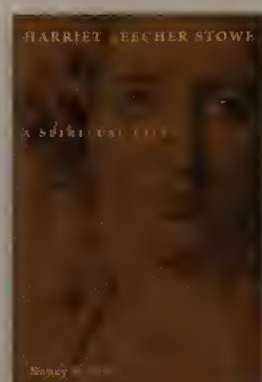
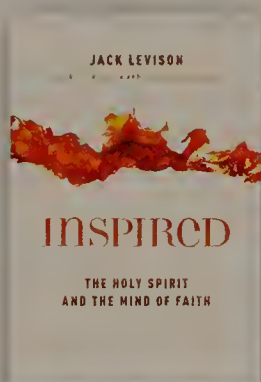
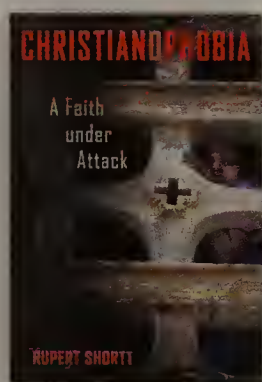
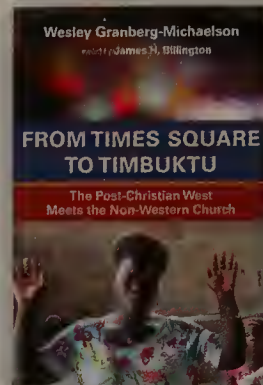
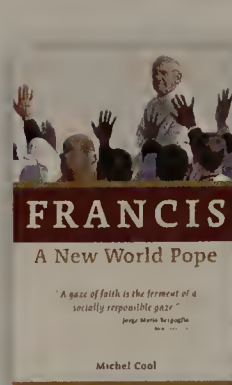
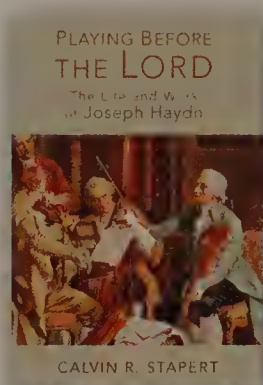
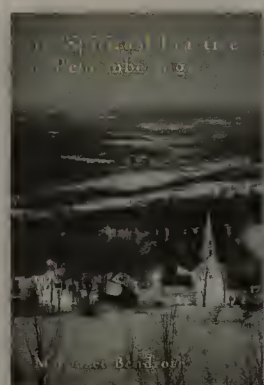
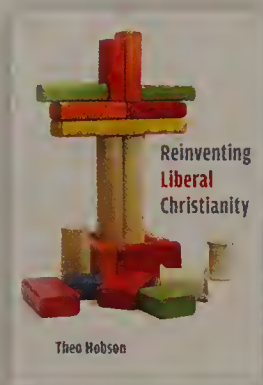
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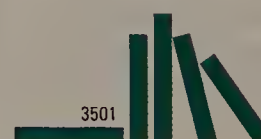
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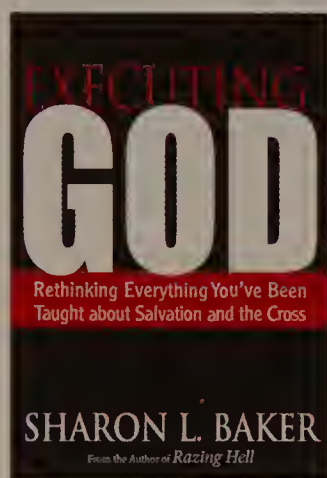


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SPRING BOOKS

Executing God: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about Salvation and the Cross

By Sharon L. Baker
Westminster John Knox,
216 pp., \$20.00 paperback



And what if Jesus said:

A man had two sons. The younger son demanded his inheritance from his father, left home, squandered it, and returned home, admitting to his father that he had sinned and begging for forgiveness.

The father responded, "I cannot simply forgive you for what you have done. You have insulted my honor by your wild living. Simply to forgive would be to trivialize your sin. Justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation cannot occur unless the penalty for your sin is paid. Either you must be punished or you must pay back the honor you stole from me.

The older brother spoke up, telling his father he would pay the debt of his younger brother. The brother worked day and night to pay the debt until he died of exhaustion. The father's wrath was finally placated against the younger brother, and they lived happily until the end of their days.

If the parable had read like this, traditional Christian theories of atonement would make much more sense, argues Sharon Baker in *Executing God: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about Salvation and the Cross*. To claim that God requires the death of an innocent son to restore God's honor—or that God punishes a blameless Jesus instead of us sinners—leads to a portrait of God very different from the one presented by Jesus. For Baker, theological consistency is essential, and not just for consistency's sake but because "our perception of God influences how we behave." A professor of theology in the Peace and Conflict Studies program at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, Baker builds a case "for a compassionate, peace-loving God who abhors violence and wants human beings to live peaceful, loving lives."

Executing God is the sequel to *Razing Hell: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about God's Wrath and Judgment*. Both books were written not for scholars but for anyone asking big theological questions about difficult topics. Baker invites readers into her theology classroom to eavesdrop on her "Atonement Day" debates about whether God had Jesus murdered. Having joined the ranks of Southern Baptist fundamentalists when she became a Christian in her twenties, Baker admits she didn't start out asking such questions. "I knew with absolute certainty how God acted and why God acted in certain ways."

Then two of her sons got sick, she went to seminary, and the bottom dropped out of her I-have-all-the-answers box. She began to ask big questions of God, questions that caused her to rethink everything she believed. With a Ph.D. in hand and classrooms full of students with theological backgrounds similar to her own, she began to share her rethinking of central—and centrally problematic—Christian teachings in hopes that students would craft theologies consistent with a God who saves through love rather than through violence and coercion.

Before Baker tackles atonement theories directly, she is clear about two things: one, all theology is built on canons within the canon, and two, the Bible's language about atonement and many other things is metaphorical. These two points are in part likely responses to critics of *Razing Hell* who worry that Baker privileges certain parts of scripture over others ("We all do it," she cautions) and those who insist that her claims are inconsistent with the literal word of God ("the New Testament mixes its metaphors . . . to explain the work of Christ"). If biblical language about Christ's sacrifice is metaphorical, and if major theories of atonement privilege particular passages and images while ignoring others, then there's room not just for alternative interpretations of the major theories but for new theories altogether.

When Baker unpacks the "most popular" theories of atonement, she is careful to review the biblical support on which they rest, and she's thoughtful in her assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. She reassures readers that although she cri-

Reviewed by Deanna A. Thompson, who teaches religion at Hamline University in Minnesota and is most recently the author of Hoping for More: Having Cancer, Talking Faith, and Accepting Grace.

tiques all of the models, she is “in no way suggesting that we discard” them. But Baker also candidly reviews how each theory ultimately endorses violence. In ransom theory, God needs the violent death of Jesus to be victorious over evil; in satisfaction theory, God requires Jesus’ death to restore God’s honor; in penal substitution theory, God’s forgiveness is contingent on an innocent man being punished for the sins of others; and in the moral example theory, God puts forward an exemplary way of living and Jesus’ life must end with the cross. God always seems to be colluding with violence, and this is the God, in all the various manifestations, that Baker is determined to execute.

At the constructive heart of the book, Baker rethinks justice and forgiveness in the story of God’s atoning work in Christ. Because atonement theories are “windows into divine character,” Baker is committed to telling an alternative story of God’s restorative justice and nonretaliatory forgiveness. Using “the interpretive lens of Jesus,” she lifts up biblical passages that feature this view of justice and demonstrates that they “harmonize with the justice Jesus taught and practiced.” In “fathoming forgiveness,” she creatively retrieves the biblical metaphor of sacrifice, showing how in both Old and New Testaments the metaphor ultimately aims at an inward state rather than just external acts. Then Baker persuasively argues that forgiveness is perhaps the most costly sacrificial act there is, for in forgiving we “sacrifice getting paid back.”

Here the parable of the forgiving father takes center stage: the father forgives his son sacrificially. This reading of justice and forgiveness becomes the foundation for Baker’s alternative atonement theory; its centerpiece—consistent with restorative justice and nonretaliatory forgiveness—is Jesus’ sacrificial act on the cross of forgiving those who put him there, “for they know not what they do.” It’s a compelling rethinking of atonement, worthy of serious attention by scholars, pastors, and laypeople alike.

However, Baker’s emphasis on consistency compels me to register a caution. The desire to streamline the story is an ancient one; in the second century a Christian writer named Tatian harmonized the four Gospels into a single narrative. Interestingly, though, the church stuck with the messier, less consistent four-narrative option. If we’re committed to listening most closely to Jesus’ portrayal of God, what happens to our tidy theories of atonement when we attend to a few other words uttered by Jesus on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

I propose that Jesus’ plaintive cry of forsakenness stubbornly interrupts our strivings for theological consistency with respect to at-one-ment with God. Even as I nod approvingly at Baker’s painfully beautiful version of atonement, I wonder how the breach opened up by the “why?” of Jesus fits in. Beyond consistent explanations of the cross, the “why?” of undeserved suffering lingers. And Jesus’ own questioning of the sufficiency of theories and explanations becomes a vital point of connection when we suffer undeservedly because of the sinful actions of others, or because we get sick, or just because.

Knowing that God does not endorse the suffering and death integral to Christ’s atoning work might indeed help us live differently; and knowing that Jesus questioned God in the midst of his suffering might help us not be overtaken by the parts of life that consistency simply can’t reach.

Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love

By Elizabeth A. Johnson

Bloomsbury, 352 pp., \$32.95



Does science really matter to faith? The religious truths that Christians cherish came to expression long before Galileo, Darwin, Einstein, and Hawking, so what could science have to teach us about God, Christ, and the meaning of life that we don’t already know from meditation on the Bible and our creeds? What difference can science make to our devotional life and theological reflection?

A lot, says Elizabeth Johnson, one of the most highly regarded contemporary Christian theologians. Professor of theology at Fordham University, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and a former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Johnson has authored many books skillfully connecting her deep Christian faith with a vibrant intellectual life. For a long time now she has been uncommonly sensitive to questions at the interface of science and religion, and her latest book solidifies her standing in the front ranks of laborers in this increasingly important field of interest.

Ask the Beasts is an original, learned, and compellingly readable enlargement of Christian theology after Darwin. The book’s title is taken from Job 12: “But now ask the beasts to teach you.” Johnson recruits this text as a wedge for opening wide the horizon of Christian theological inquiry to the world now being laid out so lavishly by the natural sciences, especially evolutionary biology.

The book takes the general form of a nuanced conversation between the Charles Darwin of *The Origin of Species* on the one hand and the Christian tradition of the Nicene Creed on the other. About half of the Christians in the United States would consider such an encounter inconceivable, but Johnson shows how a biblically informed faith can come alive, and hope can be renewed, when we look at the life-world through the lens of Darwin’s *Origin*. A more careful and sensitive reading of that masterpiece would be hard to find anywhere, and not just among theologians.

If you take seriously Job’s suggestion that you should interrogate the plants and animals of land, air, and sea, do not be surprised, says Johnson, that “their response will lead your mind and heart to the living God.” However, Christian theology, typically and unfortunately, has focused on human beings almost exclusively. Theology “has seldom asked the beasts anything,” much to its self-improvement. Johnson is aware of exceptions to the excessive anthropocentrism of Christian spirituality, but she is entirely correct that the natural world has functioned in Christian theology mainly as a backdrop to the

Reviewed by John F. Haught, professor emeritus of theology at Georgetown University and author, most recently, of Science and Faith: A New Introduction.

human drama rather than as the creative matrix of life, complexity, and consciousness that science has shown it to be.

What would happen to our theologies, then, if we looked at life as closely and compassionately as Darwin does in the *Origin*, while keeping in mind simultaneously the genetically informed developments that have taken place in evolutionary biology since Darwin's day? The most vocal evolutionists think that biology has made theology superfluous. Natural selection, not God, they insist, is the author of life. But Johnson's theologically sophisticated view of divine action allows for no real competition between natural causation and divine creativity.

Johnson's purpose is not to defend her faith against the academically sponsored materialist interpretations of evolution that have squeezed the juice right out of Darwin's own narrative of life. She leaves the apologetic task largely to others. Instead, she takes advantage of her learned reading of Darwin's text to seize the offensive and outline a constructive theology of evolution. Grounding her theological vision systematically in the claims of the Nicene Creed, she asks what we should expect the life-world to look like if it is the creation of infinite, self-giving love. Might it not look very much like the extravagantly rich and self-creative drama of life that Darwin narrates so compellingly in the *Origin*?

Johnson proposes that a close study of Darwin's account of the development of life on earth can be a significant stimulus to theological development. Instead of leading to doubts about the creed in the age of science, a frank encounter between an appropriately Christian sense of God and the Darwinian portrait of life opens the possibility of reaffirming the fundamental tenets of faith in an enlivening new way.

Take, for example, the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection. First, in view of evolution it becomes clear that the world has not been created by the "direct divine agency" of a "monarchical" God. Rather, the Creator Spirit's loving presence endows the universe with the capacity "to evolve by its own natural powers, making it a free partner in its own creation."

Second, admitting our own current dependency on life systems whose emergence required billions of years of experimentation, adaptation, and selection can lead to a theology of "deep incarnation." In view of evolutionary biology, geology, astrophysics, and cosmology, God's incarnate presence in the man Jesus extends all the way down to the most elemental levels of physical reality and all the way back in time to the earliest chapters of cosmic becoming.


And third, an evolutionary sense of

life combined with our new cosmological awareness of the enormity of space and time allows Christians to hope that in some mysterious way, all of creation is invited by God's Spirit to participate with Jesus in "deep resurrection."

Especially during a time of ecological crisis, Christians need to "ask the beasts." During the Easter vigil the church sings: "Exult, all creation, around God's throne; rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor, radiant in the brightness of your King!" Johnson comments: "At the most magnificent liturgy of the year, the church is singing to the Earth! It, too, needs to hear the good news, because the risen Christ embodies the ultimate hope of all creation."

The biologist George Williams spoke for many scientists and philosophers when he called nature a "wicked old witch" for letting life come about in the ragged, impersonal way that evolutionary biology has brought to our attention. Johnson has heard this complaint, and she is fully aware that the mystery of life's suffering and dying still remains. In response, though, her lovely and inspired book offers a theology of deep redemption. Far from editing out the rough passages in the story of life, and equally far from casting doubt on the creed, Johnson's theology invites us to be bold in considering the scope of healing that an infinite love can extend to a universe still coming into being.


After reading and meditating on this marvelous book you may never recite the Nicene Creed the same way again.



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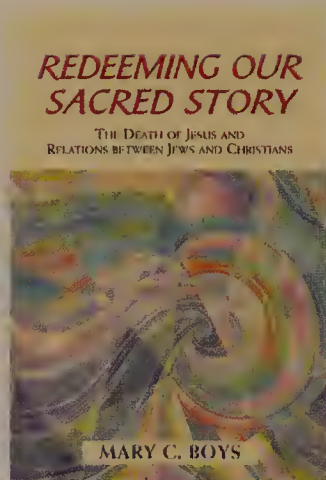
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Redeeming Our Sacred Story: The Death of Jesus and Relations between Jews and Christians

By Mary C. Boys
Paulist, 400 pp., \$29.95 paperback



Mary Boys of Union Seminary in New York, a longtime participant and advocate in Jewish-Christian dialogue, has made a singular and significant contribution to that vexed, urgent conversation. The *our* in her title concerns the Christian narrative about the crucifixion of Jesus. The book addresses how that story can be told faithfully in the presence of Jewish conversation partners. The key term in Boys's urging is *redeeming*.

Her book is divided into two parts: first, about why the story needs to be redeemed, and second, offering specific, concrete steps that can be taken to redeem it.

This symmetrical presentation is introduced by an extended discussion titled "A Trembling Telling" wherein Boys considers "wrong tellings" that have distorted this narrative and others in pernicious ways. She summons readers to move from a "troubled telling" to a "transformed telling" that no longer positions Jews as the villains in the crucifixion narrative.

In her articulation of the dominant troubled telling of the story, Boys reviews the familiar elements of the gospel narrative that treats Jews in a stereotypical way as the villains who are responsible for Jesus' death. It is important and breathtaking to recognize how powerful and central that rhetoric is to the gospel story. The texts themselves make it convenient to conclude that "the Jews" were "Christ killers."

Given that testimony, Boys reflects on the ways in which subsequent church interpretation of the text has solidified and accented the verdict of "Christ killers." She cites John Chrysostom as among the foremost champions of such a negative stereotype in the early church. And while Augustine dealt with the matter in a much more complex way, he continued the primary verdict of his predecessor interpreters. With a serious and specific dip into the Middle Ages, Boys shows how the "Christ killer" accusation became an unquestioned, widely shared view.

Moving to our own time, Boys reflects on the impact and nefarious influence of the passion play at Oberammergau in Germany, the silence of the Barmen Declaration on the topic, and the capacity of the Vatican, as late as 1928, to sort out "unacceptable" and "acceptable" forms of anti-Semitism. She judges, moreover, that even the Vatican II declaration *Nostra Aetate*, on "Non-Christian Religions," did not escape grudging ambiguity in what was a much-disputed decision. This careful reportage makes painful reading, but it is essential reading as Boys's book moves toward an effort at redeeming the crucifixion narrative. As a prelude to such a transformed telling, she reports that the managers of the Oberammergau

script have been seriously engaged in reconsideration and modification of the script to both acknowledge the problem and attempt to rectify the troubled reading in that long-running drama.

Important as this review and analysis are, the crucial and energizing part of the book is the second part, about the transformed telling. For this rereading and retelling, Boys identifies two crucial emergents in interpretive practice. The first of these is the recent recognition of the pervasive, brutalizing reality of the Roman Empire, which was "a pyramid in which wealthy elites, perhaps two to three percent of the population supported by a retainer class of bureaucrats of about five percent, ruled over vast lands and peoples." The military force of Rome had the capacity and will "to deter rebellion by terror." One tactic for such deterrence was crucifixion, a state exhibition that was "a spectacle for the edification of those watching" and that terrorized the population into submission. Boys likens crucifixion to the show killings conducted by Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, in which executed bodies were left on exhibit for all to see. Boys concludes:

We lack sufficient evidence to know for certain why the New Testament writers assign blame to Jews. What we do know is that we have compelling warrants for situating those texts in a wider horizon and for rethinking their theological meaning.

The second basis for rethinking the accusation against the Jews is to take seriously the recent scholarship on Pauline theology that breaks with the old assumption that Paul was busy attacking "Jewish law." Readers will do well to follow Boys's bibliographic guidance to the older work of E. P. Sanders and the more recent offers of Mark Nanos, Krister Stendahl, and especially Neil Elliott and Brigitte Kahl, who show that Paul's gospel is "in contrast to the imperial theology in which Caesar is worshiped as god." Thus "the law" that Paul critiques is not Jewish law but Roman law; and the critique expresses concern for those who "stepped outside of conformity with the law and religion of the Roman city and the Roman Empire."

This contrast to Rome (and not to Judaism) permits Boys to observe that the boundary between Jews and Christians, both of whom were coerced by Roman law, is fluid and that the supposed "partings of the ways" between Jews and Christians are at best ambiguous and do not permit reductionistic labels or contrasts.

As her book closes, Boys moves to a series of concrete proposals about how to work at the redemption of the narrative. The accent is on ways in which the texts exhibit a probing openness that does not admit of one-dimensional interpretation. Attention must be paid to the complexity of the early centuries, with an awareness that the larger gospel claims are not compromised if we reject the texts that are oppressive.

Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann, whose most recent book is *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word* (Fortress).

The book finishes with two surprising and helpful expositions. First, drawing on her own life as a member of a Catholic religious order, Boys ponders how the spiritual exercises of Ignatius may be useful in new probes and discernments. Such a way with the text refuses any simplistic cognitive approach and invites instead engagement of all the senses, so we might experience the sights and sounds and smells of the crucifixion scene in all of its palpable insistence. When we do that, we might not so readily focus on blame rather than on the raw power of an empire that could inflict such top-down brutality.

Second, Boys offers an exposition of the “seven last words from the cross” with particular attention to the petition, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” This riff on forgiveness is powerful guidance for a fresh reading of the entire drama. (However, this exposition is not

quite complete, for the discussion shortchanges some of the seven words.)

This volume presents us with two subtexts. One is about the deep need for rethinking and reimagining what can be said about the “saving significance” of the cross. We are at square one concerning the salvific efficacy of the cross because old formulations are clearly not adequate. The other is about the fact that we live in a time when anti-Semitism is a ready charge against any critique of the contemporary state of Israel. On both counts, this book is an opening for rethinking.

The church, in its various manifestations, has so much for which to answer and so much for which to repent. Boys shows how these tasks can be undertaken concretely in ways of generosity and graciousness that are at the heart of the story.



ESSENTIAL BOOKS ON RELIGION IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

***Religion in the Old South*, by Donald G. Mathews** (University of Chicago Press). Mathews’s 1977 classic is a relatively short synthetic analysis that clearly, profoundly, and theologically explores the meaning of Christianity in the slave society of the old South.

***Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, by Albert J. Raboteau** (Oxford University Press). Addressing themes ranging from African religions to the “middle passage for the Gods,” from the rise of slave forms of Christianity to the role of religion in slave rebellion and resistance, this masterful work retains its preeminent status as the first book to read to survey the meaning of religion for African slaves in the United States. The restrained elegance of the prose accentuates the profound importance of the subject.

***Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63*, by Taylor Branch** (Simon & Schuster). Alongside Robert Caro and Doris Kearns Goodwin, Branch stands as one of the masters of the art of narrative history. Through the sheer power of his storytelling, he establishes that the years from 1954 to 1963 were indeed the King years because Martin Luther King Jr. had a far greater permanent impact than any political, social, or religious leader of that time. Branch almost single-handedly resurrected attention to the career of King’s predecessor in his first pulpit in Montgomery, Alabama: Vernon Johns, a complex and multifaceted fig-

ure whose elusive stories and personal myth escaped even a master like Branch.

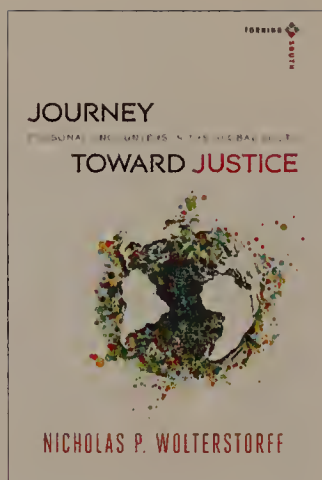
***Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920*, by Charles Reagan Wilson** (University of Georgia Press). Like Raboteau, Wilson established an entire field of study with his first book, which finds in the rise of the “Lost Cause” after the Civil War a civil religion that defined white southern culture in ways equal to the influence of evangelical churches. Wilson brings to bear anthropological studies of civil religions and explains clearly how the Lost Cause functioned as a self-contained mythos.

***Absalom, Absalom!* by William Faulkner** (Vintage), and ***Beloved*, by Toni Morrison** (Vintage). These dual literary masterpieces arise straight from the social history of the 19th-century South, but the genius of the authors in exploring the meaning and mythos of southern religion for individual characters surpasses what can be accomplished by historians, limited as they are by empirical evidence. Faulkner and Morrison each take a biblical story (most obviously in Faulkner’s case) and retell it through the lives of vividly imagined 19th-century characters. The stories themselves cannot be contained; they must continuously be retold and reinterpreted, as they are throughout the novels, for we can never fully comprehend their meaning.

Selected by Paul Harvey, coauthor of The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America.

Journey toward Justice: Personal Encounters in the Global South

By Nicholas P. Wolterstorff
Baker Academic, 272 pp.,
\$21.99 paperback



Nicholas Wolterstorff is one of the great thinkers of our time. As the Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology at Yale University and senior fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, he has been a leading Christian philosophical voice both in the academy and the church. So he is a catch for the new Turning South book series from Baker Academic, which promises to address the implications of the shift of Christianity to the Global South. The idea of the series is to invite authors to reflect on how the experience of non-European forms of Christianity is changing the nature of Christianity as a whole. Autobiography is supposed to encounter theology. So how does this book do?

At the outset Wolterstorff admits that autobiography is not his genre. The mixture of his Dutch Reformed heritage and his philosophical training makes the telling of a narrative very tricky for him. Instead, his fame rests on his finely honed philosophical skills that allow him to organize and present precise distinctions. Therefore, perhaps it isn't surprising that his autobiographical accounts of encounters with the Global South are limited.

Early on he describes a set of experiences that were formative for him back in the 1970s. The first was in South Africa in 1975, where he heard the cry for justice from black South Africans; the second was in Chicago in 1978, where he first listened carefully to the cry for justice from Palestinians. These were his "awakening experiences." He relates these narratives briefly; he doesn't paint a descriptive picture or provide a portrait of his feelings and reactions. Instead he simply documents the facts—time, location, nature of the meeting.

Later in the book he documents two other significant encounters. These accounts are more detailed. The story of his six days in South Africa in 1985, when he was called to be an expert witness in the bail-conditions court case of Allan Boesak, is gripping. He captures the drama of the courtroom and the manifest incompetence of the South African authorities extremely well, and he offers thoughtful observations comparing the dispositions of the oppressed with those of the oppressors. His description of a visit to Honduras is also engaging. The challenge in Honduras was a corrupt judiciary and policing system that allowed crimes against the poor to go unpunished.

But that is all: for the rest of the book, Wolterstorff the autobiographer disappears, and Wolterstorff the philosopher comes to the fore.

So then, the title and series description are misleading. This book is not primarily autobiographical; nor are the encounters

with the Global South central. As Wolterstorff admits, his argument can just as easily be applied to the civil rights campaign in the United States. However, this is a must-read book anyway. It is a carefully honed analysis of justice within a Christian framework. Read in this way, it is a truly great book.

Wolterstorff has given the issue of justice considerable attention in recent years. In 2008 his highly acclaimed *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* appeared, and it was followed in 2011 by *Justice in Love*. Both are demanding, detailed texts. *Journey toward Justice* is an outstanding, accessible summary of his entire argument that is desperately needed because his argument is both correct and pivotal for a Christian engagement with the world.

Unlike Plato and John Rawls (who thought about justice from the perspective of an ideal society), Wolterstorff starts with those who have been denied their fundamental rights, then sets out an account of justice that is grounded in scripture and tradition and provides a framework for social action. He is correct that justice must be grounded in the language of rights, even though rights language is occasionally abused. Rights language captures an intrinsic order within the universe: rights are grounded in "the worth, the value, the dignity of human beings."

When writing explicitly about rights that humans have (which are a subset of rights in general), Wolterstorff stresses "the Christian vision of things," in particular "God's love for each and every one of God's human creatures—more specifically, God's desire for friendship or fellowship with each and every human being." This account of rights is found in many patristic writings, including those of Ambrose of Milan, Basil the Great of Caesarea, and John Chrysostom. It is also found in scripture. Wolterstorff makes much of the translations of the New Testament that fail to recognize that rendering *dikaiosynē* as *righteousness* does not capture the centrality of the concept of justice embedded in the Greek word. He is rightly hostile to the ways in which love is set up in opposition to justice. Love should seek to advance the good of others, in respect to both their well-being and their worth.

Wolterstorff also thoughtfully and perceptively touches on the importance of empathy and the structure of social justice movements. One gem embedded in this book is his discussion of the relationship between beauty and justice. He is hostile to the propensity of some organizations to so focus on feeding and advocacy that they create an ugly environment that denigrates the people they are seeking to serve. He commends the Inner City Christian Federation, based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as a model organization that seeks to ensure that their renovated housing is beautiful because "beauty is a gift from God."

This book is an extraordinary gift to the church, an invitation into an understanding of the Christian drama that is focused on advocacy for those who are being denied their fundamental value as human beings. Accessible yet demanding, it is a powerful contribution to the literature.

Reviewed by Ian S. Markham, dean and president of Virginia Theological Seminary and author of Against Atheism: Why Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris Are Fundamentally Wrong (Wiley-Blackwell).

Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious

By Linda A. Mercadante
Oxford University Press, 352 pp., \$29.95

The most striking current trend in American religions may also be the least understood. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of Americans who claimed to have no religious affiliation more than tripled, from 14 million to 46 million. This makes the so-called nones—individuals who respond to questions about their religious affiliations with “none”—the fastest growing “religious” group in the United States, far outpacing the increase in Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims. It also means that there are now more Americans with no religious affiliation than there are mainline American Protestants.

Even these startling statistics may underrepresent the extent of the phenomenon. Young adults are three times more likely to be religiously unaffiliated than are older Americans, suggesting that the trend has far from peaked. Meanwhile,



studies point to a parallel increase in “churn”: movement between two or more religious affiliations in a lifetime. As Linda Mercadante writes in *Belief without Borders*: “From whatever angle you look, it can’t be denied that growing numbers of Americans have ceased identifying with, contributing to, or remaining devoted to any particular religious tradition or faith community.”

Given its unprecedented nature and potential social significance, this exponential growth in the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans has received surprisingly little serious examination by scholars and journalists. Popular characterizations of nones tend to fall into two broad and simplistic categories. Some commentators assume that these individuals are atheists and moral relativists—individuals who have rejected not only organized religion but all greater truths. Others bundle the nones into the category of new-age dilettantes or, as one critic puts it, “commitment phobic, overly self-focused . . . salad-bar spiritualists.”

In *Belief without Borders*, Mercadante suggests that the vast majority of religiously unaffiliated Americans are not any of these things. A professor of theology at Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Mercadante has studied the phenomenon nationally and has conducted in-depth interviews with more than 80 self-professed nones. What she reveals about



ESSENTIAL BOOKS ON JEWISH THOUGHT

***Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*, edited by Elliot N. Dorff and Louis E. Newman** (Oxford University Press). Here is an introduction to Jewish thought in bite-size pieces. This fine collection offers good tastes of the writings of great Jewish theologians of the early 20th century (such as Martin Buber, Mordecai Kaplan, and Abraham Joshua Heschel), with contemporary reflections on major themes from creation to Israel.

***The Future of Jewish Theology*, by Steven Kepnes** (Wiley-Blackwell). For theologian Kepnes, nothing is more important in the future of Jewish religion than holiness: holiness in ethics, prayer, prophecy, study, human relations, and ritual time and space. This is an elegant and compassionate journey into the Jewish spirit.

***New Jewish Feminism: Probing the Past, Forging the Future*, by Elyse Goldstein** (Jewish Lights). The past few decades have seen remarkable changes in the place and role of women in Judaism. Reflection on those changes offers one of the most important sources of insight into Judaism today. This collection offers a broad introduction

to the most recent thought on Judaism and women and on Jewish feminism.

***Health Care and the Ethics of Encounter: A Jewish Discussion of Social Justice*, by Laurie Zoloth** (University of North Carolina Press). Health care is a perennial focus of rabbinic thinking and Jewish concern. Zoloth, a leading bioethicist, brings deep Jewish thinking to issues of health care in contemporary American society. Adapting a classic rabbinic practice, her teaching integrates worldly narratives with keen and compassionate ethical reflection.

***Justice in the City: An Argument from the Sources of Rabbinic Judaism*, by Aryeh Cohen** (Academic Studies Press). Rabbinic scholar, social activist, and teacher for our times, Cohen employs the ethical reasoning of the classical Jewish sources and draws on the street smarts of a labor organizer to address the injustices of our day.

Selected by Peter Ochs, who teaches modern Judaic studies at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

their beliefs is at odds with many popular characterizations and has much to tell us about the state of religion in America.

In some ways Mercadante's work builds upon the observations of the Princeton sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow, who has posited that the increase in the number of young Americans who have turned away from organized religion is not necessarily an indication of a turn toward a more secular America. He highlights the increase in the number of spiritual options available to young people today and concludes that we have become a nation of seekers of spiritual experiences rather than dwellers in one religious home. Those who are "spiritual

but not religious" may not identify with any one church, temple, or mosque, but they also are far from being atheists (at least in the way that term is typically understood).

Mercadante's work brings remarkable nuance to Wuthnow's observations—and adds some surprises as well. She finds, for instance, that the typical none is neither a theological novice nor a moral relativist. In fact, she argues, the very reason that many nones reject traditional religious affiliations is that they are theologically sophisticated and have a strong commitment to moral principles. Mercadante writes, "What bothered most interviewees more than simplistic depictions of heaven and hell was the seem-

ing unfairness and exclusivism of it. They rejected the idea that only those from your own religion are rewarded with heaven." One interviewee said simply: "All those millions of people in China were going to hell because they didn't know Jesus. I could never figure that one out."

Other nones said they had parted with traditional religion because of its support of a patriarchal God—"the difficult-to-satisfy father, or the capricious king who could just as well smite you as help you." A number of interviewees found the interventionist God who answers prayers and works physical miracles to be the problem: "I don't think [God is] pulling for us or rooting for us. . . . I think that's a childlike vision of reality." Mercadante notes a recurring theme here: for most nones, their rejection of organized religion did not equate to a rejection of God but rather provided a context for a principled reimagining of God. In short, many nones are still theists. As one interviewee put it: "It's a very personal relationship I have with God. . . . I don't have a vision of God being a kindly old man sitting on a throne some place."

Some nones reject traditional religion because of its tensions with modern notions of science. One interviewee recalls a ninth-grade Sunday school teacher trying to explain the book of Revelation to the class: She "talked about the city with the gates and she was literally trying to draw this on a chalkboard. . . . I was mortified."

For the most part, even those interviewees who could not be labeled theists were far from being nihilists. These nones harkened back to the original, literal meaning of the word *atheism*: a belief in something other than theism.

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*Reviewed by Timothy M. Renick, who is vice
provost and professor of religious studies at
Georgia State University in Atlanta.*

One interviewee described her spiritual journey as a move from belief in “the Wizard of Oz running the show” to the embrace of a “metaphysical non-embodied entity beyond definition.” Another said, “We’re part of this collective oneness. There’s not [a] conscious being that’s separate from us. . . . There is this intelligence that you can get within your own brain.” In short, nones may be religiously unaffiliated, but with few exceptions they are not nonbelievers.

Mercadante’s study thus offers a contrast to the work of those commentators who too easily suggest that the rise of the religiously unaffiliated is tantamount to the secularization of America: “Some may think that in a postmodern era that is fragmented and shorn of meta-narratives, theology is not being done. But even in this context, people try to make sense of their lives, to find some compelling reason to get up each day, endure difficulties, find joy, and live with hope.” She even posits that a new theology may be emerging from nones.

What such a phenomenon means for American religion and American society as a whole, though, remains unclear. For centuries, organized religion has provided individuals not only with a sense of community and belonging, but with emotional, financial, and spiritual support during times of crisis. Organized religion has helped define the human life cycle by communal markers: welcoming new births, sanctioning marriages, recognizing deaths. In contrast, Mercadante writes, “What distinguishes these interviewees is their firm belief in the rightness—even righteousness—of this lack of loyalty to any particular spiritual group.” The question is not merely what will mainline American churches look like if these trends continue, but what will become the nature and shape of American society?

Belief without Borders makes two things very clear. The increase in the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans shows no signs of abating, and we all need to start paying attention to this phenomenon.



ESSENTIAL BOOKS ON EVOLUTION AND HUMAN ORIGINS

***Neanderthal Man: In Search of Lost Genomes*, by Svante Pääbo** (Basic Books). The world’s foremost expert on recovering ancient DNA tells the inside story of what it took to reconstruct the Neanderthal genome. In 2010, his team used samples of bone fragments to revolutionize thinking about Neanderthals and to reveal the existence of a previously unknown form of humanity, the Denisovans. Comparing these ancient genomes with today’s humans confirmed that living humans are the result of interbreeding and that most of us carry a small amount of Neanderthal DNA.

***Masters of the Planet: The Search for Our Human Origins*, by Ian Tattersall** (Palgrave Macmillan). Tattersall recounts what happened after our human lineage diverged some 6 to 7 million years ago from the line that led to the chimpanzees. He reviews new research and places the story of our prehuman ancestors in context, describing how walking upright and advances in stone tools led in time to the emergence of modern humans. Tattersall notes the new evidence for interbreeding but argues that modern humans are a unique and extraordinary species.

***Can You Believe in God and Evolution? A Guide for the Perplexed*, by Ted Peters and Martínez Hewlett** (Abingdon). A theologian and a scientist have coauthored this highly readable discussion of how Christians should engage the field of evolutionary biology. Writing just before the latest discoveries on human origins, Peters and Hewlett focus less on human emergence and more on general questions of evolu-

tion and creation. The authors discuss intelligent design thoughtfully, countering with their own vision of theistic evolution as the best way to interpret scripture in light of science.

***Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology*, by J. Wentzel van Huyssteen** (Eerdmans). Richly illustrated with reproductions of Paleolithic cave art, van Huyssteen’s classic book argues that humans are evolved animals who are nonetheless uniquely creative. He focuses attention on the flowering of cave art more than 25,000 years ago, suggesting that it provides tangible evidence of the unique cultural transcendence that sets humans apart among creatures. For van Huyssteen, science discerns what makes us unique while theology confesses this as the divine image.

***The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say about Human Origins*, by Peter Enns** (Brazos). Do scientific perspectives on evolution and human origins necessarily conflict with Christian faith and with a faithful reading of scripture? Enns reviews texts about Adam and Eve and argues that even with a conservative reading of the Bible, Christians can embrace scientific insights and interpret them as part of a larger theological framework that affirms our universal human need for redemption. For Enns, scripture and science do not necessarily conflict, even on the most basic issues of human evolution.

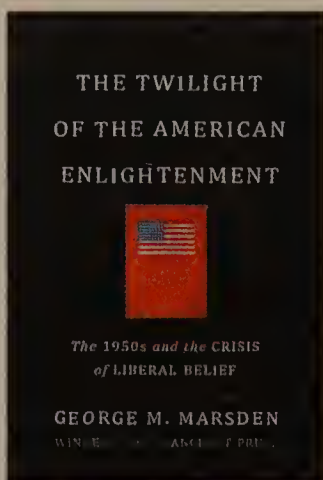
Selected by Ron Cole-Turner, who teaches theology and ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and is a founding member of the International Society for Science and Religion.

The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief

By George M. Marsden
Basic Books, 264 pp., \$26.99

Among those historians who openly identify as believing Christians, George Marsden stands alongside perhaps only Mark Noll at the pinnacle of the profession. Every scholar of American history, believer or not, knows who Marsden is.

What has been so remarkable about his professional fame is the way he has blended the demands of the secular academy with his Protestant faith. By using the methods of the secular profession to answer questions provoked by his Christianity, he has written transformative books on American evangelicalism, the place of Christianity in higher education, and Jonathan Edwards, his biography of whom is the definitive one on America's greatest theologian. Marsden has won all the big awards, too, including the prestigious Bancroft Prize and even a Guggenheim, and he served as the crown jewel in the University of Notre Dame's free-spending



attempt to gather the most talented Christian scholars in all of academia.

He did all this while continually pushing back against his fellow evangelical scholars, whom he viewed as overly parochial. While they were interpreting the past by falling back on scripture-as-evidence or by explaining things as "God-ordained," Marsden reminded them to leave the supernatural aside and "support the rules necessary for constructive exchange of ideas in a pluralistic setting."

"I am not," he wrote, "challenging pragmatic liberalism as the *modus operandi* for the contemporary academy." Instead, he was using "pragmatic liberalism" as a way to explore questions that interested him, questions that often derived from his faith.

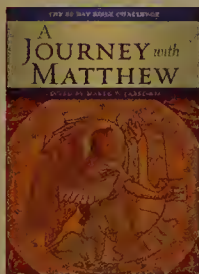
Knowing this background helps clarify what he's doing in this brief, highly readable treatise: he explains the rise of our gridlocked civic life by arguing that the secular ideals of the Enlightenment (which reached their peak in the United States in the 1950s) and the unbending stance of the religious right are both to blame. Neither makes space for the other, and gridlock is the inevitable result.

Marsden's biggest complaint is with the secular intellectuals of the 1950s, who championed Enlightenment ideals like equality and reason without being able to locate a deep premise on which to base those beliefs. Having forsaken Christianity and given up dogmatic, deeply rooted ideologies,

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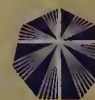
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the secular intellectuals of the 1950s championed values like individualism and autonomy. When the baby boomers came of age in the 1960s, they took these 1950s ideals and ran with them, sacrificing the commonweal in quests for personal fulfillment. The country lost its moorings, calls for renewal emerged, and—presto!—the religious right came to life in order to restore good Christian living. The failures of the secular Enlightenment led to the rise of the religious right, and each side hated the other.

This is, of course, the standard story of the rise of the religious right. Marsden adds a new twist by placing the blame on the failure of the Enlightenment ideals of the 1950s rather than on the sense of entitlement felt by the baby boomers. And this leads him to investigate the ideas of some leading midcentury intellectuals and to find them all coming up short. We learn a good deal about Arthur Schlesinger Jr., David Riesman, Erich Fromm, and Reinhold Niebuhr, and their passionate commitment to “individual freedom, free speech, human decency, justice, civil rights, community responsibility, equality before the law, due process, balance of powers, economic opportunity, and so forth.”

Marsden’s ultimate effort is to pan these thinkers for valuing “individual autonomy” over the bonds of community and for refusing to premise public ideals on a single intellectual tradition. Because this is his goal, it seems a tad unfair to leave out intellectuals like Jane Jacobs,

Michael Harrington, and even William F. Buckley Jr., each of whom sought to develop a sensibility for traditional communities.

But Marsden is not eager to defend the religious right’s anti-Enlightenment, pro-Christian stance, either. He spares no ink in showing the limitations of its adherents. They neglect “issues regarding equity and pluralism,” are “ambivalent toward the American heritage,” and fail to realize that once “matters are framed in terms of warfare and simple either-or choices it becomes virtually impossible to negotiate those issues in a pluralistic society.”

He’s no defender of the firebrands on either side. Which is to say that Marsden understands the key problem in American life today: the problem of pluralism and the need to do away with “either-or choices.”

In his final chapter, “Toward a More Inclusive Pluralism,” Marsden attempts to address this key problem by arguing that the country’s recent secular approach to pluralism has been to hear only voices that originate from the same rational basis, a basis that excludes people of faith. Marsden then relies on the work of Dutch thinker Abraham Kuyper to advocate a more parliamentary form of public life, one “built around the recognition that varieties of viewpoints,

Reviewed by Kevin M. Schultz, who teaches history and religious studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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including both religious and secular viewpoints, exist and ought to be included in a genuine pluralism.” In today’s America, Marsden argues, this doesn’t happen. The secular intellectuals of the Enlightenment have won the day (though the book’s title announces their “twilight”), and they are using their premises to keep quiet those with religious perspectives.

On the one hand, it’s hard to argue with the idea that we should entertain a variety of voices in our public life. On the other hand, it’s difficult to understand how this isn’t being done already. In his recent State of the Union address, President Barack Obama asked those of different backgrounds, including “faith leaders,” to come together to reform the country’s immigration laws. When it came to health care, people of faith were brought to the table to discuss how the Affordable Care Act might be developed. They didn’t get everything they wanted, but neither did anyone else. That’s politics. But did anyone castigate, say, a Catholic priest for wearing his collar and approaching the table with an identifiably religious perspective? Not at all. Concessions were made to accommodate nearly everyone.

Most ironic of all is the case of Marsden himself. Marsden has particular ire for his professional home, the university, which he sees as having acquiesced to the values of the secular Enlightenment. Yes, it may be true that the way in which people develop a common language that

advances collective knowledge is by giving up certain foundational principles. But scholars are hardly punished any more for identifying their religious beliefs. Book after award-winning book has acknowledgments thanking a pastor or a church community—or even God. Marsden is the best example of *not* suffering from what he sees as “prejudice against religious-based views.” He was never shy about having gone to Westminster Theological Seminary before heading to Yale for his doctorate. Nor did he ever disavow the fact that he taught at Calvin College and Duke Divinity School before heading to Notre Dame. And yet, even though he was so open about his religious commitments, nothing stopped him from winning nearly every award the profession has to offer. To have someone like George Marsden claiming to be a member of a subjugated minority is a bit of a mystery.

The United States was unique in blending Enlightenment ideals with religious goals, and it continues to do so to this day. But the key problem of the United States—how to function as a single nation when its citizens possess such diverse foundational beliefs—seems as present as ever. Resolving it requires humility and a willingness to make concessions, both of which are foundational ideals in America’s particular version of the Enlightenment. One wonders, then, if the religious right will read this book with a similar humility.



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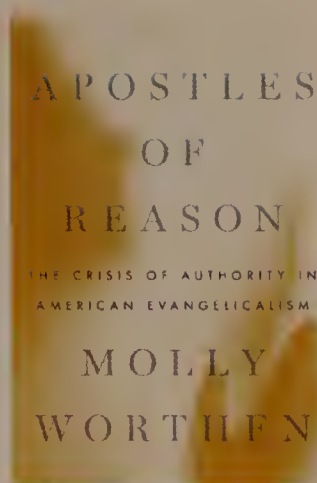
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Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism

By Molly Worthen

Oxford University Press, 376 pp., \$27.95



In the spring of 1980 when I learned the improbable news that I had been accepted into a doctoral program, two people I much admired weighed in with their reactions. My adviser, for whom I had written a master's thesis on biblical inerrancy, warned me darkly that the people at Princeton would "come after me" on the inerrancy question. I hoped that my father, an evangelical minister, might betray even a hint of pride that his eldest son had been admitted to study at an elite university. Instead, he became very quiet before expressing his fear that my intellectual pursuits would jettison my piety.

I offer that anecdote (at the considerable risk of being overly self-referential) because it illustrates the tensions at play in Molly Worthen's remarkable and textured study *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*. And I compound my transgression by recalling the title of a tract in the narthex of my father's church back in the 1960s: "Missing Heaven by Eighteen Inches," the distance between one's head and one's heart.

Worthen, a historian at the University of North Carolina, constructs a kind of genealogy of ideas in American evangelicalism from the postwar period to the present. One strain, generally identified with neoevangelicalism and the early years of Fuller Theological Seminary, was really a form of presuppositionalism derived from the work of Cornelius Van Til, longtime professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, who argued that believers should not shy away from their conviction that all knowledge is derived from God and scripture. Another strain, more indebted to the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition (and often mistaken as anti-intellectual), eschewed arid rationalism in favor of a robust piety. At the heart of evangelicals' conflicted identity, Worthen argues, is the "struggle to reconcile reason with revelation, heart with head, and private piety with the public square."

The saga of evangelical conflict, in

Reviewed by Randall Balmer, chair of the religion department at Dartmouth College. His newest book, Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter, will be released in May.

Worthen's telling, begins with biblical inerrancy. In identifying inerrancy as the touchstone of evangelical identity, evangelical scholars in the Reformed tradition sought to refight the intellectual battles they had lost in the previous century, but they also allied themselves with a rationalistic approach to faith that they combined with a "Christian world-and-life view." Not all evangelicals signed on, but the inerrantists, especially through the agency of *Christianity Today* and various other institutions, used the doctrine as a foundation for their reemergence on the national scene. "The credo of the *Christianity Today* crowd," Worthen writes, "was becoming evangelicalism's predominant public theology."

Some Wesleyans, Mennonites, Pentecostals, and fellow travelers sought to resist being sucked into the Reformed-inerrantist vortex. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, a member of the Nazarenes, protested the "ground swell of ultra-rightism," which she attributed to "Calvinistic evangelicalism." The charismatic renewal and the move of some evangelicals toward more liturgical traditions further splintered a movement already known for its fissiparous tendencies.

But the neoevangelicals possessed institutional advantages. Most evangelicals by the 1970s were becoming enamored of education: the neoevangelicals tended to brandish better educational pedigrees, and most evangelicals had abandoned their reflexive disdain for the social sciences, especially when those methods could be harnessed in service to missions and church growth.

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Worthen blames the eclipse of left-leaning evangelicals on their failure “to offer a grand narrative that could compete with the plotline emerging on the Right: an account of American history that began with pious Puritans and Bible-believing Founding Fathers, culminating on the Manichaean battlefield of the Cold War.” And the author attributes the emergence of the religious right to a “multidimensional panic over the Bible’s authority.”

This interpretation might sound a tad simplistic, but it is not implausible. Worthen asserts that evangelicals’ political conservatism is a reaction to the charismatic renewal’s “exaltation of a personal, ecstatic encounter with God,” which in turn “challenged the obsessive rationalism undergirding the doctrine of inerrancy.” The reassertion of a cramped literalism may explain the religious right’s opposition to women’s rights and gay rights (19th-century evangelicals found ways to maneuver around the former issue), but it hardly accounts for other elements in its agenda, such as militarism or the celebration of capitalism.

Worthen suggests that many evangelicals found the authority they were seeking in a phalanx of evangelical experts. None was more important or prominent than Francis Schaeffer, a pseudo-intellectual whom Worthen devastatingly characterizes as “a brilliant demagogue who offered up all of Western history in an hour’s lecture, stripped of confusing nuance.” Schaeffer’s brilliance lay in

his media savvy and in his forging of history into a sword for the culture wars. “He deployed the trappings of academic investigation—litanies of historical names and dates; an accommodating version of Enlightenment reasoning—to quash inquiry rather than encourage it, to mobilize his audiences rather than provoke them to ask questions.” Schaeffer represented the culmination of the neoevangelical crusade to construct an intellectual movement around inerrancy and a “Christian” worldview; ironically, that culmination degenerated into anti-intellectualism.

Others, most of whom also hailed from the Reformed tradition, followed Schaeffer’s lead: Tim LaHaye, Rousas John Rushdoony, and a legion of young-earth creationists, all of whom trumpeted their fidelity to inerrancy. The conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979 signaled not only a retreat from progressive evangelicalism but also an improbable redefinition as part of the Reformed tradition. Similarly, my own Evangelical Free Church had recast itself in the 1960s and 1970s from a holiness-pietist denomination that ordained women to an ostensibly Reformed denomination that forbade women’s ordination.

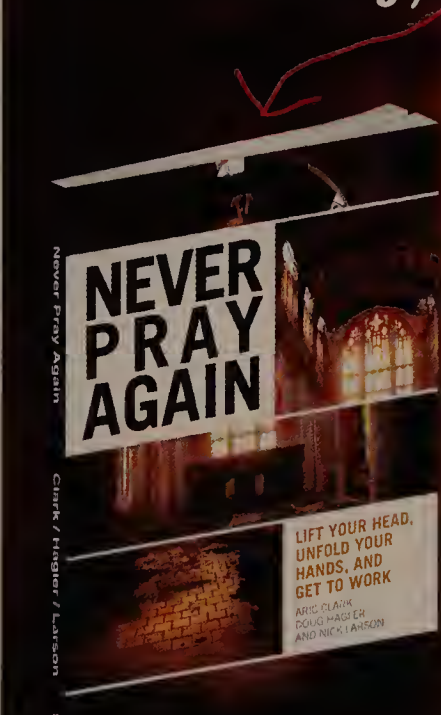
Unlike Schaeffer’s treatment of history, Worthen’s intellectual history of evangelicalism over the last seven or so decades is nuanced, and her arguments are compelling. It is a measure of the quality and the provocative nature of the book that I wish the author had pushed even further. She establishes, for

instance, the correlation between Calvinism and cultural and political conservatism, but not causation. Is there something inherent in Reformed thinking that breeds conservatism, at least in the American context? The lineage is extensive: Charles Hodge and the Princetonians, J. Gresham Machen, Carl McIntire, Schaeffer, and countless others, including D. G. Hart, Machen’s biographer. What drives them—ineluctably, it seems—toward the hard right?

In part, *Apostles of Reason* is a call to recognize the internal diversity of evangelicalism, to look beyond the media dominance of the neoevangelical fixation with biblical inerrancy and a “Christian worldview” to find remnants of “the Anabaptist tradition of peace witness or Wesleyan ideas about Christ’s call for social justice.” The fact that the hyperrationalism of neoevangelicals devolved into popular anti-intellectualism is a paradox indeed, but it is no greater paradox than the invocation of Jesus to justify a right-wing agenda.

Perhaps a better word for the latter is *tragedy*, not *paradox*. Neoevangelicals preoccupied with the mind might have done well to consult another organ 18 inches distant.


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Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It

By Jennifer Michael Hecht
Yale University Press, 280 pp., \$26.00

The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was a kind of poet. The distinguished poet Jennifer Hecht is a kind of philosopher and a first-rate historian of ideas. In her previous book, Hecht traced the vicissitudes of the meaning of doubt in our culture, and in these beautifully written pages she jogs our collective memory about the topic of suicide. But this study is much more than a compilation of summarized and well-packaged positions.

Most arguments contra the moral legitimacy of suicide are built on premises of faith, on the view that you are robbing God of God's property. Hecht, in contrast, is intent on providing secular reasons for refraining from what historically and rightly has been called self-murder.

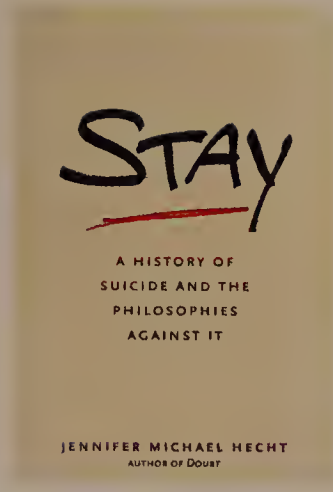
From the outset Hecht stresses that the book is "chiefly about despair suicide, rather than what might be called end-of-life management." In her reckoning, when the terminally ill terminate their lives, it is more of a matter of choosing how to die than it is self-murder.

This history of our thinking about suicide reaches back to the Old Testament and the story of Samson. Petitioning the Lord for superhuman strength, the prisoner Samson took revenge against his captors by pulling down the temple walls, killing himself and the Philistines.

Hecht notes that although there is only one suicide in the New Testament, that of Judas, early Christian thinkers such as Eusebius did not bring the gavel down on suicide. They even celebrated it under certain circumstances. Thought-provoking reflections on the nexus between martyrdom and suicide hint that in at least some cases, martyrs were eager to take the express lane to the seventh heaven.

The great advocates of self-annihilation were, of course, the Stoics. They believed that there is no freedom for the individual who is chained to this crazy life by the desire for self-preservation. The Stoics consciously reminded themselves that the door is always open, that so long as you are willing to take your own life, there is always a remedy. Still, as Hecht perceptively observes, Seneca and company did not recommend the noose as a way of coping with, say, being jilted by a

Reviewed by Gordon Marino, who teaches philosophy at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, where he is director of the Hong Kierkegaard Library. His edited volume The Quotable Kierkegaard was recently published by Princeton University Press.



lover. At one point Seneca was profoundly depressed; Hecht quotes him: "I saw not my own courage in dying but his [Seneca's father's] broken by the loss of me. So I said to myself, 'You must live.' Sometimes even to live is an act of courage."

Aquinas, Augustine, and later Luther and Calvin all classified suicide as an egregious transgression. And throughout the Middle Ages, those who did themselves in were done in again after death. Hecht registers this grizzly but common event: "When a Parisian man killed himself by plunging into the Seine in 1257, his body was fished out and his case tried. He was found guilty, and his body was sentenced to torture; most commonly, that meant being drawn and quartered, or eviscerated and hanged by the neck before the community and left there until birds and maggots consumed the corpse." Or again: "In 1590 the coroner of London ordered that the top of the stake pinning down the corpse of Amy Stokes be left exposed to provide deterrence of other would-be suicides." Furthermore, the property of those who took their own lives was confiscated by the state.

The years following the Reformation issued in a more tolerant attitude toward suicide, and some even argued that it was religious guilt and especially the doctrine of predestination that drove individuals to the ledge.

One of the great merits of this work is that Hecht does not give short shrift to those who carry a brief for suicide. During the Enlightenment, there was a shift from thinking of suicide as a sin to understanding it in clinical terms, as the terrible and final blossom of melancholy. And the pro-suicide reasoning that we find in the likes of Hume, d'Holbach, and Voltaire were supercharged by animosity toward religion.

Recall that the religious reasoning for pressing ahead through the vale of tears was that we are the property of our Creator and therefore have no right to disturb the Creator's plan. Hume, however, contended that even if there is a God, "we are no more disturbing his plans by taking a life than by saving it." Bioethicists such as John Hardwig have maintained that we have a duty to die when keeping ourselves alive depletes the resources of the family and the community. Presaging that position, Hecht paraphrases Hume as saying, "When our existence becomes a burden we ought to kill ourselves," if only to provide an example and help our fellow

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human beings to grasp that so long as you keep death as an option, you are never condemned to misery. But Hume's claim that suicide adds to the common good contradicts Hecht's main point: that the ramifications of suicide are long and destructive.

As the old adage goes, "I have a right to do what I want as long as I am not hurting anyone else." This belief prompts the conclusion that we are morally entitled to take our own lives. Hecht, however, marshals many facts in support of her axial position that suicide not only devastates families but "causes suicide." She pins this well-established fact on the board: "A suicide by a parent while a child was under the age of eighteen tripled the likelihood that the child would commit suicide." And then Hecht sighs over her fellow poet: "It is hard not to think of Sylvia Plath killing herself in her kitchen in England, while her children slept, and some forty years later, . . . her son Nicholas Hughes taking his own life, too." One could argue that we have a duty to resist the temptation to imitate terrible actions, but make no mistake about it, the temptation is real.

I have an acquaintance who refuses to drive because his father took his own life with an automobile, and he fears that he might be taken over and unable to resist the same impulse. Freud termed this "identification," and Hecht is wise to remind us of the mysteriously powerful impulse to imitate those with whom our lives are inextricably bound up. Hecht might have added that the psychological gravity that tugs us toward mimicking those we love or hate holds not just for suicide but for

substance abuse, anger management problems, and a host of other behaviors—all of which affirms the point that Hecht keeps circling around: that no man or woman is an island. No matter how alone we might feel in our inexplicable pain, we are creatures in community. Or again, "The whole of humanity suffers when someone opts out."

Speaking personally, I have spent time in the basement with some very dark thoughts, and like the author, I have friends who pulled the trigger, so it is an unwelcome task to raise an eyebrow about Hecht's laudable efforts to wrap her intellectual arms around those who are desperate unto death. Yet I suspect that no small portion of those who try to take their own lives do so believing that they are sparing their loved ones from having to live in the cloud that follows them. Hecht encourages people to hold on because good things might be in the offing. That is often true, but far from always. Life *is* good—sometimes.

This gift of a book is as much about the issue of pain in life as it is about not ending your life because of the pain. Following in both a religious and a secular tradition, Hecht submits that suffering is soul-making. When I am not walking under the black sun I am inclined to agree, but there are other times and other moods in which it seems reasonable to believe that there are pangs so intense and so persistent that they threaten to perform a root canal on what is most precious to us, our ability to love. Nietzsche's famous "what does not kill you makes you stronger" is an overstatement.

One might think that Hecht is going to press to the judgment that those who pull the cord because they cannot or will not endure some psychic pain are cowardly and blameworthy. Although that might seem the logical conclusion, Hecht has the wisdom to understand that life is not an argument. She is simply intent on providing people who are at the razor's edge a reason to endure, a reason to *stay*. She writes: "I do not mean to pass judgment on those who have committed suicide. I mean instead to express to the suicidal person who has rejected suicide that you deserve gratitude from your community and from humanity."

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Gratitude: An Intellectual History

By Peter J. Leithart

Baylor University Press, 350 pp., \$49.95



Jesus was an ingrate,” Peter Leithart writes, and he thinks we should be thankful that he was. So were the Protestant Reformers. Indeed, much of the modern world is in debt to the revolutionary power of Christian ingratitude. That, in any case, is the counterintuitive thesis of Leithart’s provocative new book. Sentimental reflections on the importance of gift giving are a common way to combat modern cynicism, but Leithart will have none of that. In fact, if the power of generosity is often thought to be one of the great heritages of Western history, Leithart’s book can be seen as one long act of ingratitude. Sometimes, Leithart seems to be saying, it is more blessed to reject than to receive.

The main characters of Leithart’s story are two geometrical elements, circles and lines. In the ancient world, Leithart argues, gifts were circulated with the expectation that they would be returned. In tribal societies, among the ancient Greeks, and in the Roman republic, generosity was a form of political power. Patrons handed out favors in order to put recipients in their debt. Gratitude had to be demonstrated in deed, not just expressed in word. Clients were expected to repay gifts with loyalty and obedience. Gifts thus created closely integrated communities, but at the price of inclusivity. Gifts were the encircling boundary that kept these social groups closed to outsiders.

The modern world threw lines like daggers into the heart of this circular way of thinking. From the perspective of the circle, gifts without strings attached are a wasted opportunity to bond people together. From the perspective of the line, however, the strings wrapping a gift are like the trappings of a spider’s web. We are so aware of the burden that gifts can place on others that we are hesitant to get ourselves trapped in other people’s needs. That is why we think that gifts should be given without any thought of return. We want our gifts to be a particular kind of line: a ray that has a beginning but keeps going without ever turning back. When linear-minded givers are thanked, they often say “It was nothing” in order to minimize the importance of their action. To insist on gratitude is to make the very basic mathematical mistake of thinking that lines can turn into circles.

We tolerate circles in private, but in public we accept only lines. When circles break into the public realm, we call it bribery. Although much of the rest of the world mixes patronage with commerce, we modernists are purists when it comes to economic exchange. Even in private, among family and friends, we are suspicious of circles. Gifts that anticipate some kind of repayment are better called loans. Trouble will result if you mix the languages of circles and lines.

Gifts once made the world go ’round, but now they seem more moral trouble than they’re worth. How did we get so far from the ancient world’s conviction that gift-giving practices are essential for the common good?

Ancient Athens and Christianity play crucial roles in Leithart’s story. For roughly 150 years, Athens developed the first noncircular political system by replacing personal patronage with democratic equality. Christianity did to religion what Athens did to politics. Athens put the political ruler beyond the influence of gifts. Christianity did the same for the ultimate ruler, God. Athenian leaders were expected to serve the common good without regard to the personal loyalty created by gift giving, just as Christians argued that God’s gifts are unconditional and thus unaffected by our sacrifices and offerings.

Jesus inaugurated a kind of holy ingratitude by “assaulting the gift practices of his contemporaries.” His views were in continuity with much of the Old Testament, but by the time of his ministry, Hebrew culture had assimilated the Greco-Roman connection of giving with honor and prestige. Jesus mocked public displays of generosity and forbade his followers to use gifts “to gain leverage or impose debts.” Paul puts Jesus’ words into practice by exhorting believers to owe nothing to anyone except God. For Paul, to give is to put ourselves into debt to others, a complete reversal of the traditional understanding of generosity. Because the church has only one patron, Jesus, all Christians are equally in his debt, which frees us to give to each other without expecting anything in return.

The Romans were right to call the early Christians atheists because they were ungrateful for all that the gods, not to mention the emperors, had done for them. Medieval Christians lapsed into the old circular ways of thinking, Leithart argues, by turning the mass into an economic exchange, which is why the church needed the Protestant Reformers to be ungrateful, like Jesus, to the priests who preceded them.

Leithart is aware that the modern world has taken linearity to an extreme. We need social circles; lines just don’t always do the trick. Ingratitude’s creative destruction of older traditions can go too far. “Ingratitude is a necessary moment of social and political life, without which there can be no progress, but when it is detached from circularity of every kind,” Leithart admits, “it can only collapse or run aground.” Removing gratitude from public life makes politics more partisan and commerce more callous. In the ancient world, being a receiver was shameful because it meant that you were weak and vulnerable, but today we are ashamed to be in a position of power, as the opportunity to give seems to require. As a result, it seems easier to delegate giving to others, in the government or the churches.

Nonetheless, Leithart wants to embrace modernity, not reject it. His solution is what he calls the infinite circle of Christian giving. Our sacrifices are rewarded, just not in this life. “Because givers can expect a return from the Father,” he writes, “they can give generously without anxiety about depleting their resources.” By making the circle of giving begin and end with God, Christianity lets us hope that the lines of our giving can loop back into one all-encompassing community.

Leithart is right, I think, to try to show that Christianity allows for circles after all, although it is hard to see how an infi-

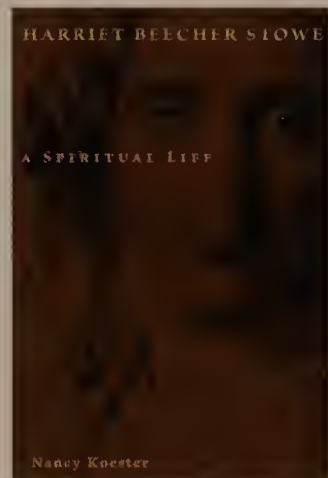
Reviewed by Stephen H. Webb, who taught religion and philosophy at Wabash College for 25 years and is author of Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints (Oxford University Press).

nite circle can ever connect with finite lines. Is grace really that far removed from the mutual demands of exchange? What I take away from this book is the need for a non-Euclidean geometry of giving. Giving involves us in all sorts of messy and deformed relations, but God is always ready to turn our gifts into beautiful and unpredictable shapes.

Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life

By Nancy Koester

Eerdmans, 384 pp., \$24.00 paperback



I am sick of the smell of sour milk, and sour meat, and sour everything, and then the clothes will not dry, and no wet thing does, and everything smells moldy; and altogether I feel as if I never wanted to eat again.” So complained Harriet Beecher Stowe to her husband, Calvin, nine years and five children into their marriage. This is not the Stowe with which most readers are familiar—the “little woman who made this big war,” as Abraham Lincoln reportedly said about the famous author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

The Stowe of Nancy Koester’s new biography is a deeply spiritual but overburdened woman whose 85 years, spanning the bulk of the 19th century, saw her constantly juggling her roles as daughter, sister, wife, mother, and author. This is a Stowe brought to life in relationship with others and with her God. As Koester writes, “What makes us truly human in any race or time or place, [Stowe] thought, is our capacity to be in relationship: first with God, and then with other people.” Just as Stowe struggled to reconcile the pressures of domestic life with her calling as an author, so she also struggled to reconcile the judgmental God of her ancestors with the loving God for whom she longed.

Koester, a historian of Christianity in America who teaches at Augsburg College and is an ordained Lutheran minister, develops the themes of relationship and balance over the ups and downs of Stowe’s life. As the sixth child of Lyman and Roxana Beecher, Harriet was born into a loving family orbiting around a dominant but devoted paterfamilias. Koester metaphorically describes how Lyman dedicated himself to renovating the cold and stark theological house of New England Calvinism for 19th-century Americans who wanted a more welcoming abode. Lyman softened the predestination of his Puritan forebears and opened the doors of the old house to any who would willingly come in and help with the renovations. But Lyman remained committed to the idea that anyone who did not come in of his or her own accord—anyone who did not have a conversion experience—could not be welcomed or saved.

Harriet also devoted herself to renovating the house. But, like many of her siblings, she rejected her father’s uncompromising conversionism for the hope that “probation does not

end with this life, and the number of the redeemed may therefore be infinitely greater than the world’s history leads us to suppose.” Though she had always had faith in a sympathetic God, the key event that led her in this direction was the death of her beloved son Henry at the age of 19 in 1857.

Henry had died, unconverted, by drowning in the Connecticut River when he was a student at Dartmouth. His premature death, not the publication and wild success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is the biography’s turning point. This is because Koester is primarily invested in describing Stowe’s spiritual life instead of covering ground already well trodden by other scholars. Koester uncovers the quiet, day-to-day joys and sorrows of marriage and child rearing, Harriet’s visits to churches and cathedrals overseas, the pleasure she took in God’s natural creation, and the physical illnesses and depression she and her loved ones soldiered through. This is a Stowe whose turn to the liturgical and sacramental Episcopal Church and then to spiritualism later in life makes perfect sense, as she rejected the harsh iconoclasm of Puritanism and sought meaningful connection with those she had loved and lost.

Of course, Harriet’s writing career also receives plenty of attention in the volume, but Koester weaves Stowe’s many short pieces and books into the fabric of her life instead of primarily using her life to illuminate her writings. Here we see hints of tension between the God of love and mercy whom Stowe pursued throughout her life and the God of justice and judgment who underlies her antislavery texts. Though Stowe has been criticized for depicting Uncle Tom as submissive and long-suffering, she promised in her most famous novel that “those who protect ‘injustice and cruelty’ will surely call down ‘the wrath of Almighty God!’” And in her second antislavery novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, Stowe put this prophecy in the mouth of an angrier and more proactive African-American character, Dred, “a prophet who calls down God’s wrath on sinners.” Stowe needed both attributes of God, it seems, which is why she struggled to adapt the deity of her forebears and to reform the church from within rather than leaving him and it behind for the comfort of Universalism or the antiestablishment stance of William Lloyd Garrison.

Koester efficiently summarizes Stowe’s major and lesser-known works, detailing the social and political context behind their publication, and she discusses Stowe’s writing process and the support she received, especially from her loving husband and her famous siblings Catharine and Henry Ward Beecher. The narrative flows smoothly, though sometimes at the expense of in-depth analysis. For example, although Koester acknowledges that Harriet was “limited by her own assumptions about race,” she almost always rises above the insidious paternalism of antebellum racial thinking in Koester’s respectful rendering. So while Koester acknowledges that Stowe’s depiction of slave religion was a form of “racial stereotyping,” she surmises that “it also describes Stowe herself. Her mind was impassioned and imaginative, always attached itself to hymns and pictures, always working in a vivid and pictorial way.” One wonders if this is not itself

Reviewed by Kathryn Gin Lum, who teaches American religious history at Stanford University.

a form of gendered stereotyping; other scholars have suggested that Stowe knowingly conformed her narrative voice to antebellum expectations of how women's religiosity was supposed to be expressed.

While Koester is at her best when writing of Stowe's family relationships, it would also have been illuminating to see more about Harriet's relationships with the domestic workers who made possible the white, middle-class privilege of her education and writing time—from the indentured African-American servants who cooked for the family when Harriet was a child, to the former slaves and the live-in assistants who cooked, cleaned, and raised her children while she was away for months at a time courting publishers and promoting her books.

Koester has accessibly translated an exemplary 19th-century life for a 21st-century audience. Her Stowe is a woman to be admired and emulated but who also is recognizable to today's readers in her struggles to find a balance between her work and her spiritual life.



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TUESDAY, JUNE 3, 9AM

Dr. Evelyn L. Parker

Tending the Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class and Gender

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 9AM

Dr. Mark R. Gornik, Dean Maria Liu Wong, Dr. Janice A. McLean-Farrell

The Next Generation: Practicing Youth Ministry in the Global City

THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 9AM

Pastors Rebecca & Jorge Gonzalez

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Faith MATTERS

by Samuel Wells

A different way to pray

YOU'RE HAVING COFFEE after the worship service on a Sunday. You say "Hi!" to someone you know, ask how are you, what's up, and you catch up on this and that. And then, just as you're finishing, your conversation partner takes hold of your forearm, and her tone changes. "Say a prayer for my dad, will you? He's not himself, the dementia's really kicking in, and I feel like he's losing his identity inch by unrelenting inch." And you look into your friend's eyes and see the cost of what's required to keep going, and you say, "I'm so sorry. This must be such a bewildering time for you. Of course I'll pray for your dad. And I'll pray for you too."

But then you've made a promise. A promise you have to keep. How exactly do you pray for a person in such a situation? What words can you find to wrap around this kind of long, slow-burning tragedy, in which lives and souls unravel and there's no sign of the dawn?

There are two conventional ways to pray for your friend and her dad. I'm going to call the first way resurrection. It's a call for a miracle. You just say, "God, by the power with which you raised Jesus from the dead, restore this man in mind and body, make him himself again, and bring my friend the joy of companionship and the hope of a long and fruitful family life together."

There's a big part of you that wants to pray this prayer. You love your friend. You see how watching her dad disintegrate before her eyes is breaking her heart. You want God to show some compassion, some change, some action. In the back of your mind you maybe have a sense of some other Christians who seem to pray for resurrection all the time, and you wonder if you should have more faith and expect God to do amazing things every day. But you've also seen hopes dashed, Alzheimer's ends only one way, and part of you can't even say the word *heal* because it seems that healing just isn't going to happen. You know Christianity's founded on the prayer of resurrection—but sometimes you just find it too hard to say.

The other conventional kind of prayer is the prayer of incarnation. It's a call for the Holy Spirit to be with your friend and her father. It's a recognition that Jesus was broken, desolate, on the brink of death, and that this is all part of being a human being, part of the deal you sign onto the day you're born. Our bodies and minds are fragile, frail, and sometimes feeble. There's no guarantee that life will be easy, comfortable, fun, or happy. The prayer of incarnation says, "God, in Jesus you shared our pain, our foolishness, and our sheer bad luck; you took on our flesh with all its needs and clumsiness and weak-

ness. Visit my friend and her father: give them patience to endure what lies ahead, hope for every trying day, and companions to show them your love."

The irony about this prayer is that while the resurrection prayer expects God to do all the work, this prayer stirs us into action ourselves. If we say, "Send them companions," we've got to be wondering if there's anyone better placed to be such a companion than we ourselves. Deep down our friend knows that the prospects for her father are pretty bleak. What she's really asking for when she nervously puts her hand out to clasp your forearm is, "Help me trust that I'm not alone in all of this." Chances are you can help her with that. But you'd hardly be human if you didn't feel powerless and inadequate in the face of all she's going through.

Although these are the most common prayers, and in many circumstances they say pretty much all we want or need or ought to say, resurrection and incarnation aren't the only kinds

When we promise to pray for others in their distress, what do we pray for?

of prayer. There's a third kind—a prayer of transfiguration. It goes like this: "God, in your son's transfiguration we see a whole reality within and beneath and beyond what we thought we understood; in their times of bewilderment and confusion, show my friend and her father your glory, that they may find a deeper truth to their life than they ever knew, make firmer friends than they ever had, discover reasons for living beyond what they'd ever imagined, and be folded into your grace like never before."

Maybe this is your real prayer for your friend and her father, and for yourself. "Make this trial and tragedy, this problem and pain, a glimpse of your glory, a window into your world. Let me see your face, sense the mystery in all things, and walk with angels and saints. Bring me closer to you in this crisis than I ever have been in calmer times. Make this a moment of truth, and when, like your disciples, I cower in fear and feel alone, touch me, raise me, and make me alive like never before."

Samuel Wells is the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

ON Media

Papal indulgence

Alexander VI was the worst of the Borgia popes, against whom the Reformation was right to protest. He's the subject of the Showtime series *The Borgias*. There were three popes from the Borgia family from the 15th to the 17th centuries, and, of the three, Alexander VI was the most infamous: he was accused of simony, lechery, and adultery—which gives the English actor Jeremy Irons some material to work with. If you ever find yourself wondering how Martin Luther or John Calvin could imagine the pope as the Antichrist, give this series a gander.

Steven Spielberg was the one who suggested that Neil Jordan turn his two-hour biopic into a cable series. He did, brilliantly, and the show's cancellation after three seasons left fans clamoring for more. Among cable TV dramas, *The Borgias* is much like *The Tudors* (neither one is big on historical accuracy) and *Game of Thrones* (which, though not based on real events, also has lots of naked people and violent deaths).

The Borgias compels us with the shock that this man—with a common-law wife, three grown children, a mistress, and backup mistresses whose bastard children can hold out against incest for only so long—is actually the pope at a time when the papacy was more powerful than it ever was or would be. The bishop of Rome crowned kings, and he was one, fighting for and against them in a dazzling variety of tawdry military alliances. All the Christian world had to pay homage to him—in this case, in devotion and gold. He had to pay the same to other cardinals to buy his election—he had abbeys and bishoprics to offer them. He was more like the godfather than the holy father.

"Simony!" Cardinal Orsini shouts at

the first gathering of cardinals after the pope's enthronement. He is poisoned soon after by the pope's son Cesare—himself a bishop and then a cardinal, who wishes he were a warrior and swears he will be now that his father needs protection. "We draw the line at murder," the pope intones, with no effect, and not for the last time.

Alexander's conscience does buckle occasionally—just not as often as his desire for the sultry voice on the other side of the confessional screen. He swills from his flask as he discusses whether political threats are more likely to come from France or Spain. He is never surprised at the depth of wickedness of which others are capable—because he's capable of going quite deep in that direction himself. He is human and believable.

The pope welcomes the Jews expelled from his native Spain. When an adviser asks, "Did the Jews not kill our Lord?" the pope responds, "I thought our Lord was killed by Romans"—and he has his contemporaries in mind. He receives a Muslim sultan who so enjoys the papal hospitality that he seeks to become Christian. However, rivals in Constantinople have offered a sufficient price for his head that it's more convenient for the pope to have him killed.

My favorite scene comes toward the end of season one. King Charles VIII of France (Michel Muller) enters Rome at the head of 25,000 troops and a fearsome new weapon for which there is no Italian word: cannons. He plans to depose the Borgia pope, but when he encounters Alexander VI he finds the pope in a simple friar's habit, at prayer, prostrate in St. Peter's. The king of France and his holiness discuss the roles that "we did not choose—they were chosen for us." The



GODFATHER: Jeremy Irons plays the ruthless and ambitious Rodrigo Borgia, who became Pope Alexander VI in 1492.

pope keeps his throne and King Charles marches on to Naples, convinced that was his destination all along. For a moment a pope is holy and a king is noble and merciful. But only for a moment.

The show has many missed opportunities to make something of holiness as well as of sin. Every age, even the age of the Borgias, has saints, monks, mystics, nuns, and scholars who can teach us something of God's holiness. Even though Catherine of Genoa lived in Italy and made a stir with her acts of holiness and her visions, she merits no mention in the show.

Heirs of the Reformation think God raised up the Reformers to topple such popes as these. The only hint of reform here is a maniacal Savonarola. The one cardinal who purports to care about restoring the holiness of the church—a Cardinal della Rovere (played with understated dignity by Colm Feore)—can imagine no other way to do that than by the force of French arms or the poisoned chalice.

The show can portray power, rivalry, intrigue, jealousy, murder—in short, sin. But to portray holiness—the holiness that actually moves the sun and the stars? That would be a cinematographic feat indeed.

The author is Jason Byassee, senior pastor at Boone United Methodist Church in North Carolina.

by Carol Howard Merritt

CHURCH in the MAKING

Keeping the church weird

When we imagine what a church can become, there is one thing that can be a great liability or a considerable asset: the church building itself. It can be difficult to know what to do with the stained glass and soaring ceilings, especially when a congregation needs a new mission and ministry.

I began to understand some of the complexities when I ate lunch with a real estate agent who specializes in selling historic properties in Austin, Texas. She had a passion for “keeping Austin weird,” which is shorthand for keeping the corporate franchises at bay while allowing the local arts and sense of history. When our conversation moved to contemplating the future of the church, I began to talk about buildings.

“The bricks and mortar have become a noose around our necks,” I said, shaking my head. “Congregations spend so much money on sanctuaries that seat 700, while they’re lucky to get 50 people showing up on a Sunday. They can’t afford a pastor or any mission, because all their money is going to plumbing patches and roof repairs.” I imagined tearing down the churches and building structures that would be green and sustainable.

“We could have a competition. Architects could come up with a prefab sanctuary that we could construct on an empty lot. Then we could have low-cost sanctuary kits

available.” I continued to explain my plan until I noticed my friend’s discomfort.

“Most of our landfill waste comes from building deconstruction,” she interjected. “We can’t just keep adding to that. These old buildings are well made and historic. You can’t just tear them down. Surely we can think of new uses for them.”

I realized my friend wanted to keep the church weird. I also understood that the issue was more complicated than my slash-and-burn approach allowed. However, the questions still remain. What should we do when a congregation can no longer afford a pastor, ministry, *and* a building?

Julia Groome, director of the Episcopal Church Building Fund, spends a lot of time trying to enliven people’s imaginations when it comes to church buildings and ministry.

“We are so emotionally tied to our buildings,” Groome said. “When we get to the point when we can’t afford the building and the clergy, we cut the clergy to save the building. We are preserving monuments instead of doing mission and ministry.”

Groome asks congregations to reassess all of their space and start thinking about its purpose. “Why not use the building for something worthwhile—a critical mission? We aren’t country clubs.”

The fund started an annual symposium, “Buildings for a

New Tomorrow,” to foster an honest, denomination-wide discussion about structures, including the question, “Do we need them?”

Groome told me about a church in Bolen, New Mexico.

The fund asked the church “to look at the community and find out what it needed,” Groome explained. The church members knew that on Friday nights at 7 there was nowhere to go in town except to a bar. So they invited people to hang out at the parish house, where there would be free wi-fi and baked goods and coffee to purchase. They didn’t do it to get people in the pews on Sunday; the goal was to serve their neighbors.

“There’s no lack of need in our communities,” Groome said. “The big thing would be for people to be able to look at buildings in a critical, detached, and realistic way. How can this best help serve our missions? Do we need this building? How can we use it to serve God in the best time and place?”

Nancy Wind echoed the need for detachment. She explained that the key to Isaiah’s Table, a new ministry she coordinates in Syracuse, New York, is realizing that “space is to be used. Space is not to be kept.”

Wind is a lay leader in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),

who was part of a church that closed. The denominational body assumed the property but didn’t sell it right away. Wind and a few other leaders from the former congregation sold the contents of the congregation’s buildings and then began using the space to host a breakfast on Saturday to which they invited people from the community. People gathered together a few minutes before breakfast was served to sing the doxology. After they ate, they had a Bible study or discussion, where everyone listened to the wisdom of the group.

“It’s really rich to be a part of the faith-sharing and hearing ideas about God, especially since our community is made up of people who typically live on the margins of society,” said Wind. In the summers, Isaiah’s Table has a community garden and uses wagons to give out produce to neighbors.

Recently, the building was sold to a Baptist congregation, which allows Isaiah’s Table to continue its ministry alongside three immigrant gatherings. The five worshiping communities have a sense of sharing and mutual respect. They know that with flexibility and a bit of detachment, they can use the existing building to reach out to different people. And the church can remain a little bit weird.

Carol Howard Merritt is author of Reframing Hope and Tribal Church and cohost of God Complex Radio.

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ROBIN MEYERS, author of *Saving Jesus from the Church: How to Stop Worshipping Christ and Start Following Jesus*, coming to CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH, HELLERTOWN, PA, for lectures and discussion, "The Future of Christianity in America, Its Theology and Practice." Saturday, June 14, 9–3 p.m., \$20, lunch included. Reservation required; churchoffice@christlutheranhellertown.org.

Book—THE EVOLUTION OF A PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN: Making Dramatic Turnarounds Along Life's Journey, by Rev. M. Laurel Gray. My journey from traditional to progressive Christianity. Amazon.com (e-book); laurelgray5@live.com (paperback).

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

PASTOR WANTED—The United Church of the San Juans is an ecumenical congregation affiliated with the ELCA, PC (USA), UCC, and UMC. We seek a full-time pastor to provide thought-provoking and pertinent sermons, guide our various faith journeys, and help us fulfill our mission and ministries. Our dedicated Church Council and lay ministry teams handle mission and outreach, congregational care, education, and many other aspects of church life. A welcoming, inclusive church, UCSJ has experienced steady growth since its founding in 2003. The church building, completed in 2009, is beautifully equipped and debt-free. UCSJ is located in Ridgway, a small town surrounded by the spectacular San Juan Mountains of southwest Colorado in Ouray County. The county's year-round outdoor activities and vigorous arts community attract both active retirees and families. The tourism, education, and government sectors provide employment, along with ranching, construction, and real estate. For more details about the position, visit our website at www.ucsjridgway.org and click on "Pastor Wanted" on the home page. Please submit your résumé to mickg@ouraynet.com or sswartz@ridgwayco.net.

Independent Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Birmingham, AL, is seeking a dynamic, experienced individual as full-time DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. The DCE will be responsible for all educational ministries of the church. Independent Presbyterian Church is a 100-year-old, 2,400-member church, supporting ministries dedicated to the glory of God. Please visit us at www.ipc-usa.org. For additional information: kathlburns@gmail.com.

The Myers Park Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC, seeks SENIOR MINISTER candidates. Requirements include strong preaching skills, passion for social justice, vision for Christian discipleship in our rapidly changing society, ecumenical relationship experience, personal and professional integrity, and commitment to historic free church principles. Professional or academic doctoral degree from an accredited institution is preferred. Contact ministersearch@mpbconline.org. Learn more: www.mpbconline.org.

SENIOR PASTOR, HEAD OF STAFF, John McMillan Presbyterian Church—Our welcoming, Christ-centered congregation of 500 members in an economically stable suburb south of Pittsburgh, PA, would welcome an individual having the experience and energy to help maintain and grow the levels of activities and enthusiasm we have experienced and enjoyed for several decades. As a mission-oriented congregation, we are focused on partnering with other churches and organizations to step out in faith to serve others. Persons with above-average interests in mission and young families will receive special consideration. See our MIF # 05711.AF0. E-mail PIFs to: pncjmpe@gmail.com.

We are Shandon Presbyterian Church and we are looking for a SENIOR PASTOR/HEAD OF STAFF who is an engaging preacher, collaborative leader, and gifted administrator. Our worship is and will continue to be innovative traditional. We are firmly committed to service and outreach, to our life of unity amidst diversity, and to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We are a congregation of 1,200 members in Columbia—South Carolina's largest city, state capital, and home of the University of South Carolina. And we are about to celebrate our 100th birthday! See our MIF #: 22342.AH0. E-mail: pnc@shandonpres.org.

EDUCATION SPECIALIST—The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one of the largest church pension funds in the U.S., seeks an energetic and experienced self-motivated individual interested in continued professional growth. This position, which requires a college degree and seven years' experience in employee benefit plans, will be responsible for delivering comprehensive retirement, financial, and related educational programs to plan members to help them better understand, appreciate, and appropriately utilize the Benefits Plan and Assistance Programs of the Board of Pensions. To view the complete job description and requirements, please visit www.pensions.org and click on Employment Opportunities. If you believe you have the professional and personal credentials to join our Member Education Team that supports our special mission of service to those who serve the Church, please send your résumé along with a cover letter indicating your salary history and requirements in complete confidence to: Sheldon Dennis, Director of Human Resources, The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2000 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103. Fax: (215) 587-7129. E-mail: resumes@pensions.org. EOE.

PASTOR for interdenominational congregation located in the City of Horseshoe Bay, TX, a retirement/resort community in the Texas Hill Country, 60 miles northwest of Austin, near Marble Falls, on Lake LBJ. The Church at Horseshoe Bay, a 750-member congregation, is seeking an experienced, ordained minister to serve as pastor. Job emphasis will be on preaching, pastoral care, and community outreach. Will work collegially with the senior pastor, whose job emphasis is similar. Opportunity exists for future advancement, depending on performance. This congregation is an equal opportunity employer. Respond to Jim Jorden, P.O. Box 8111, Horseshoe Bay, TX 78657; e-mail: jjorden@verizon.net.

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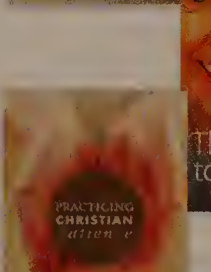


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SCALA / ART RESOURCE, NY

Scenes from the Lives of Sts. Stephen and Lawrence (1448–1449), by Fra Angelico

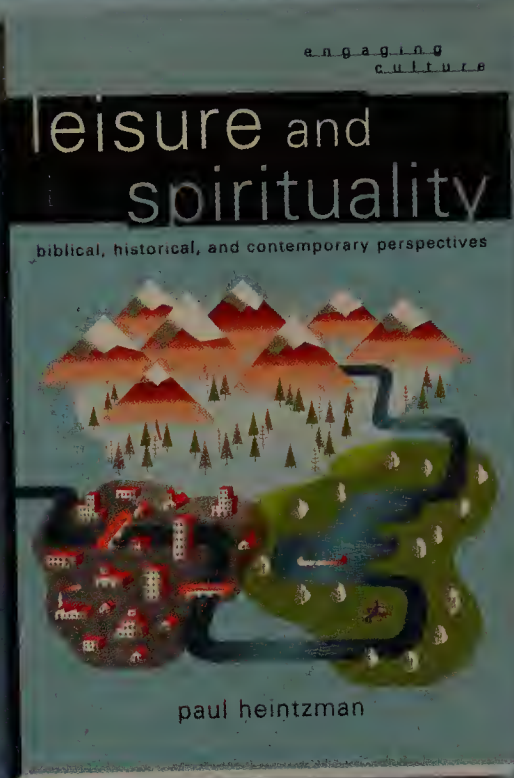
An early Renaissance fresco by Fra Angelico (1395–1455) in the chapel of Pope Nicholas V at the Vatican commemorates St. Lawrence (m. 258) and St. Stephen. Scenes from the lives of the two martyrs extend across three walls of the chapel. The scenes were selected to show the saints' parallel activities: being ordained, preaching, and helping the poor. They were both arrested, persecuted, and martyred. The arrest of Stephen can be seen on the left-hand side of the lunette, and the stoning is visible on the right. The wall of Jerusalem separates the scenes. The Sanhedrin brings Stephen to his doom before the men with the rocks who will stone him. As the stones are hurled at his back, Stephen kneels in prayers of petition, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59; cf. Luke 23:46), and forgiveness, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60; cf. Luke 23:34).

Art selection and commentary by Heidi J. Hornik, who teaches in the art department at Baylor University, and Mikeal C. Parsons, who teaches in Baylor's religion department.

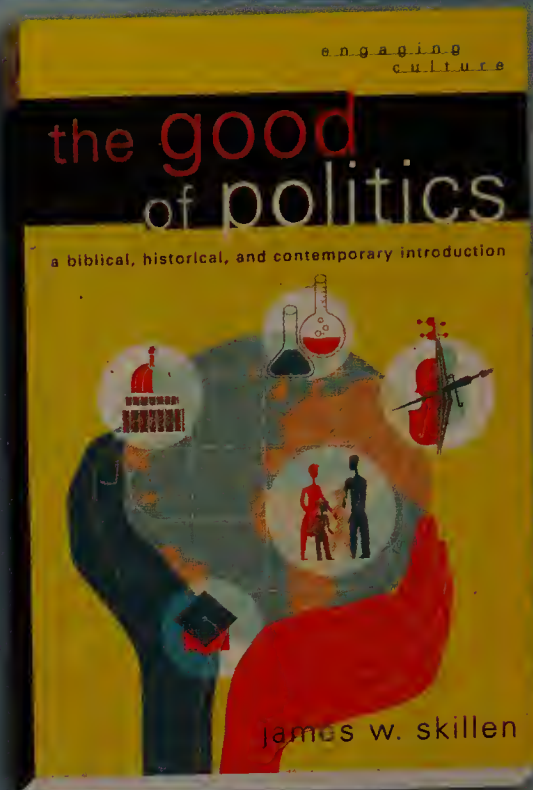
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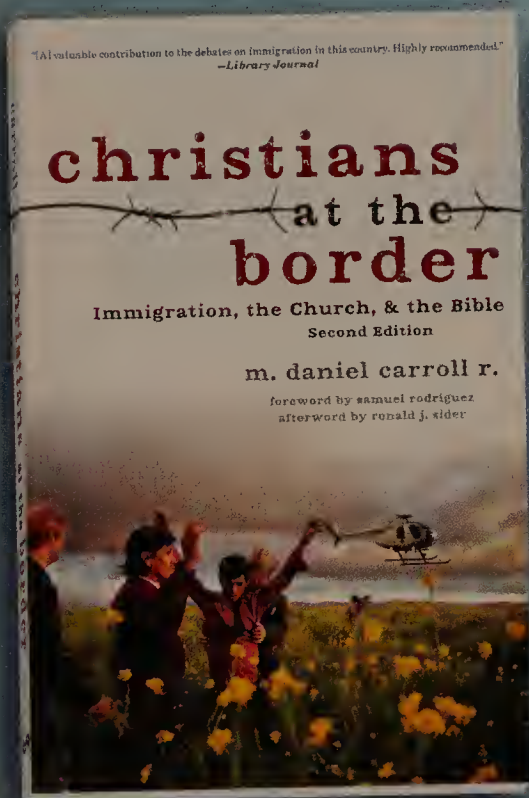
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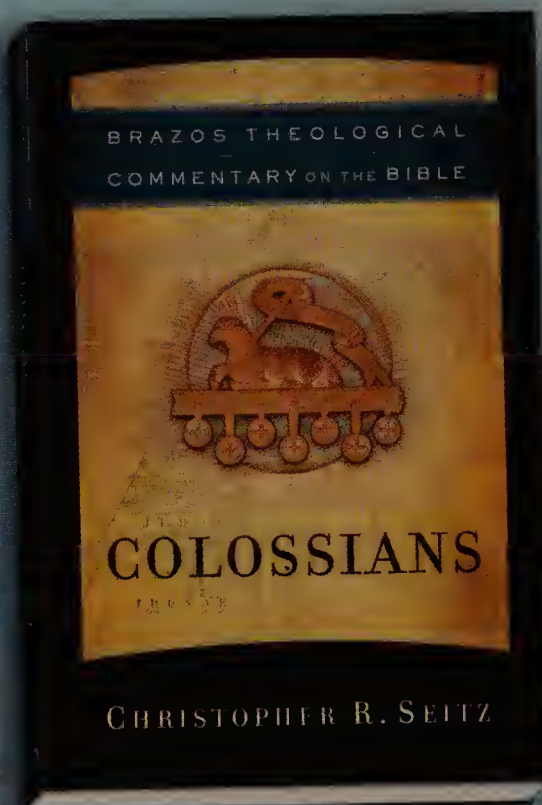
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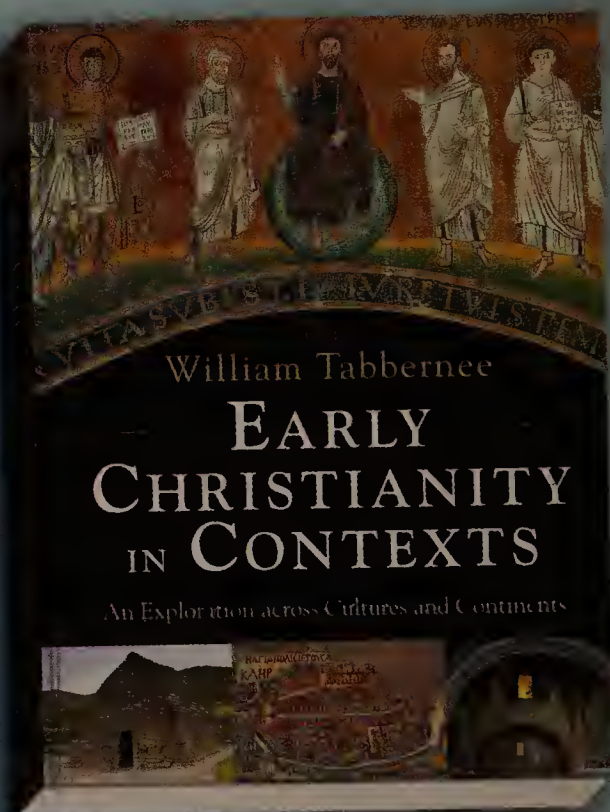
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